

KRISHNAVATARA V

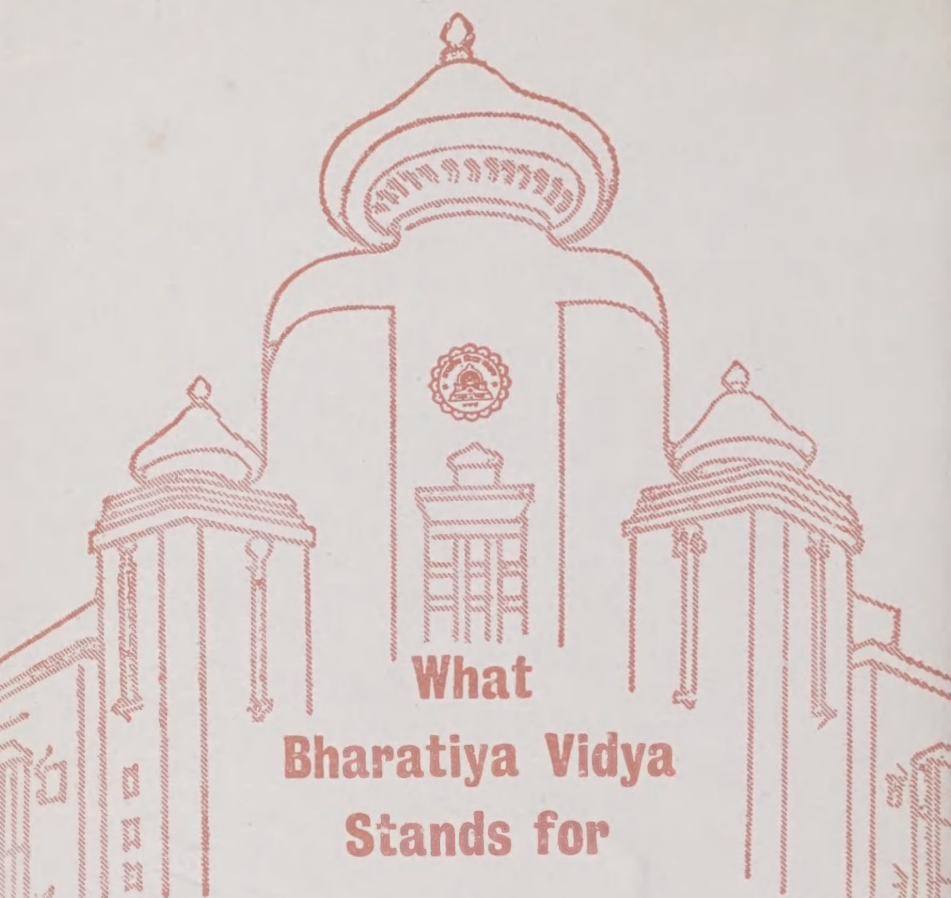
THE BOOK OF SATYABHAMA



K.M. MUNSHI



BHARATIYA VIDYA BHAVAN, BOMBAY-7



What Bharatiya Vidya Stands for

Bharatiya Shiksha must ensure that no promising young Indian of character having faith in Bharat and her culture Bharatiya Vidya should be left without modern educational equipment by reason merely of want of funds.

2, Bharatiya Shiksha must be formative more than informative, and cannot have for its end mere acquisition of knowledge. Its legitimate sphere is not only to develop natural talents but so to shape them as to enable them to absorb and express the permanent values of Bharatiya Vidya.

3. Bharatiya Shiksha must take into account not only the full growth of a student's personality but the totality of his relations and lead him to the highest self-fulfilment of which he is capable.

4. Bharatiya Shiksha must involve at some stage or other an intensive study of Sanskrit or Sanskritic languages and their literature, without excluding, if so desired, the study of other languages and literature, ancient and modern.

5. The re-integration of Bharatiya Vidya, which is the primary object of Bharatiya Shiksha, can only be attained through a study of forces, movements, motives, ideas, forms and art of creative life-energy through which it has expressed itself in different ages as a single continuous process.

6. Bharatiya Shiksha must stimulate the student's power of expression, both written and oral, at every stage in accordance with the highest ideals attained by the great literary masters in the intellectual and moral spheres.

7. The technique of Bharatiya Shiksha must involve—

(a) the adoption by the teacher of the *Guru* attitude which consists in taking a personal interest in the student; inspiring and encouraging him to achieve distinction in his studies; entering into his life with a view to form ideals and remove psychological obstacles; and creating in him a spirit of consecration; and

(b) the adoption by the student of the *Shishya* attitude by the development of—

(i) respect for the teacher,

(ii) a spirit of inquiry,

(iii) a spirit of service towards the teacher, the institution, Bharat and Bharatiya Vidya.

8. The ultimate aim of Bharatiya Shiksha is to teach the younger generation to appreciate and live up to the permanent values of Bharatiya Vidya which is flowing from the supreme art of creative life-energy as represented by Shri Ramachandra, Shri Krishna, Vyasa, Buddha and Mahavira have expressed themselves in modern times in the life of Shri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Swami Dayananda Saraswati, and Swami Vivekananda, Shri Aurobindo and Mahatma Gandhi.

9. Bharatiya Shiksha while equipping the student with every kind of scientific and technical training must teach the student, not to sacrifice an ancient form or attitude to an unreasoning passion for change; not to retain a form or attitude which in the light of modern times can be replaced by another form of attitude which is a truer and more effective expression of the spirit of Bharatiya Vidya; and to capture the spirit afresh for each generation to present it to the world.



आ नो भद्राः क्रतवो यन्तु विश्वतः ।

Let noble thoughts come to us from every side

—Rigveda, I.89.-i

BHAVAN'S BOOK UNIVERSITY

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KRISHNAVATARA

Volume V

By

K. M. MUNSHI

BHAVAN'S BOOK UNIVERSITY

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KULAPATI'S PREFACE

THE Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan—that Institute of Indian Culture in Bombay—needed a Book University, a series of books which, if read, would serve the purpose of providing higher education. Particular emphasis, however, was to be put on such literature as revealed the deeper impulsions of India. As a first step, it was decided to bring out in English 100 books, 50 of which were to be taken in hand almost at once.

It is our intention to publish the books we select, not only in English, but also in the following Indian languages: Hindi, Bengali, Gujarati, Marathi, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam.

This scheme, involving the publication of 900 volumes, requires ample funds and an all-Indian organisation. The Bhavan is exerting its utmost to supply them.

The objectives for which the Bhavan stands are the reintegration of Indian culture in the light of modern knowledge and to suit our present-day needs and the resuscitation of its fundamental values in their pristine vigour.

Let me make our goal more explicit:

We seek the dignity of man, which necessarily implies the creation of social conditions which would allow him freedom to evolve along the lines of his own temperament and capacities; we seek the harmony of individual efforts and social relations, not in any make-shift way, but within the frame-work of the Moral Order; we seek the creative art of life, by the alchemy of which human limitations are progressively transmuted, so that man may become the instrument of God, and is able to see Him in all and all in Him.

The world, we feel, is too much with us. Nothing would uplift or inspire us so much as the beauty and aspiration which such books can teach.

In this series, therefore, the literature of India, ancient and modern, will be published in a form easily

accessible to all. Books in other literatures of the world, if they illustrate the principles we stand for, will also be included.

This common pool of literature, it is hoped, will enable the reader, eastern or western, to understand and appreciate currents of world thought, as also the movements of the mind in India, which, though they flow through different linguistic channels, have a common urge and aspiration.

Fittingly, the Bobk University's first venture is the *Mahabharata*, summarised by one of the greatest living Indians, C. Rajagopalachari; the second work is on a section of it, the *Gita*, by H. V. Divatia, an eminent jurist and a student of philosophy. Centuries ago, it was proclaimed of the *Mahabharata*: "What is not in it, is nowhere." After twenty-five centuries, we can use the same words about it. He who knows it not, knows not the heights and depths of the soul; he misses the trials and tragedy and the beauty and grandeur of life.

The *Mahabharata* is not a mere epic; it is a romance, telling the tale of heroic men and women and of some who were divine; it is a whole literature in itself, containing a code of life, a philosophy of social and ethical relations, and speculative thought on human problems that is hard to rival; but, above all, it has for its core the *Gita*, which is, as the world is beginning to find out, the noblest of scriptures and the grandest of sagas in which the climax is reached in the wondrous Apocalypse in the Eleventh Canto.

Through such books alone the harmonies underlying true culture, I am convinced, will one day reconcile the disorders of modern life.

I thank all those who have helped to make this new branch of the Bhavan's activity successful.

K. M. Munshi

INTRODUCTION

Everyone has heard of Sri Krishna who delivered the message of the *Bhagavad Gita* and whom the *Bhagavata* calls 'God Himself'.

From the earliest days my memories go back to, Sri Krishna has, in a sense, dominated my imagination. In my childhood I heard of his adventures with breathless amazement. Since then I have read of him, sung of him, admired him and worshipped him, both in a hundred temples and every year on his birthday at home. And day after day, for years and years, his message has given strength to me in my life.

Unfortunately, his fascinating personality, which can be glimpsed in what may be called the original *Mahabharata*, has been overlaid with legends, myths, miracles and acts of worship.

Wise and valorous, he was, loving and loved, far-seeing and yet acting in the living present, gifted with sage-like detachment and yet intensely human; a diplomat, a sage and a man of action with a personality as luminous as that of a divinity.

The urge, therefore, came upon me, time and again, to embark upon a reconstruction of his life and adventures by weaving a romance around him.

It was an almost impossible venture, but like hundreds of authors, good, bad and indifferent, from all parts of India for centuries, I was impelled by an irrepressible urge and I could not help offering him the little imagination and creative power I possess, feeble though they are.

I have called the whole work *Krishnavatara, The Descent of the Lord*.

The First Part, which ends with the death of Kamsa, has been named *The Magic Flute*, for it deals with his boyhood and is associated with the flute which hypnotised men, animals and birds alike, of which innumerable poets have sung with such tenderness.

The Second Part, which ends with Rukmini Haran, has been named *The Wrath of an Emperor*, as the central theme is the successful defiance by Sri Krishna of Jarasandha, the Emperor of Magadha.

The Third Part is entitled *The Five Brothers*—the five sons of Pandu, the Emperor of Hastinapura,—and ends with Draupadi's *swayamvara*.

The Fourth Part, entitled *The Book of Bhima*, leads up to the founding of Indraprastha.

This, the Fifth Part, is entitled *The Book of Satyabhamu*. It revolves around what appears to be an authentic incident in Sri Krishna's life, the Syamantakamani (or magic jewel) episode, which is described in several Puranas, though each version differs from the others in several details; sometimes, even in the same version, the events are self-contradictory. Besides, all of them do gross injustice to the noble figures concerned, including Sri Krishna himself, and they are totally irreconcilable with their characters and personalities as reflected in other episodes.

It was, therefore, with some difficulty that I have been able to reconstruct the core of this episode in consistence with the general tenor of Sri Krishna's life and personality.

The Sixth Part is entitled *The Book of Vyasa, The Master*.

I hope to carry forward the series till the episode when, on the battle-field of Kurukshetra, Krishna reveals himself as the Eternal Guardian of the Cosmic Law—*Shashvata Dharma Gopta*—to Arjuna, if it is His will that I should do so.

It has been a difficult task because the *Mahabharata* refers to Krishna only insofar as he affects the life of the Five Brothers; there is also a personal tradition in *Hari Vamsa* and other Puranas which consists in describing the episodes in his life unconnected with the lives of the Five Brothers. I have had to weave them together.

Since 1922 I have reconstructed the episodes connected with Chyavana and Sukanya in *Purandara Parajaya* (a play); with Vasishtha and Arundhati in *Avibhakta Atma* (a play); with Agastya and Lopamudra, Vasishtha and Vishwamitra, Parashurama and Sahasrarjuna in *Vishvaratha* (a romance), *Deve Didheli* (a play), *Vishwamitra Rishi* (a play), *Lomaharshini* (a romance) and *Bhagavan Parashurama* (a romance) summarised in English in one volume entitled *Bhagavan Parashurama*. I am now reconstructing the events in the life of Sri Krishna and the heroes and heroines of the *Mahabharata* in these volumes of *Krishnavatara*.

Introduction

Time and again, I have made it clear that none of these works is an English rendering of any of the old Puranas.

In retelling Sri Krishna's life and adventures, I had, like many of my predecessors, to reconstruct the episodes inherited from the past, so as to bring out his character, attitude and outlook with the technique of modern romance for portraying a sustained personality. I also had to give flesh and blood to various obscure characters referred to in the *Mahabharata*.

In the course of this adventure, I often had to depart from legend and myth, for such a reconstruction by a modern author must necessarily involve the exercise of whatever little imagination he has in presenting a connected and cohesive narrative.

I trust He will forgive me the liberty I am taking, but I must write of Him as I see Him in my imagination.

Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan,
Chowpatty Road,
Bombay-7.
February 3, 1968.

K. M. MUNSHI

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CHARACTERS IN THIS STORY

SRI KRISHNA :	
BALARAMA	— his elder brother;
SUBHADRA	— his younger sister;
VASUDEVA	— his father;
DEVAKI	— his mother;
GARGACHARYA	— his family preceptor and the High-Priest of the Yadavas;
UDDHAVA	— his cousin, the third son of his uncle Devabhaga;
BRIHADBALA	— his cousin, brother of Uddhava;
RUKMINI	— his wife, Princess of Vidarbha;
SHAIBYA	— his wife, Princess of Karavira-pura;
YUYUDHANA SATYAKI	— his intimate friend;
KRITAVARMA	— his another intimate friend, a Yadava chief and the son of Satyabhama's maternal uncle;
KING UGRASENA	— the head of the Andhaka clan of Yadavas, 'king' of Dwaraka;
SATYAKA	— the head of the Vrishni clan of Yadavas, father of Yuyudhana Satyaki;
AKRURA	— the saintly chief of the Vrishni clan of Yadavas, who looks upon Sri Krishna as a god;
KAPILA, PINGALA	— twin sisters, wives of Uddhava.
SATRAJIT	— an elder Yadava chief;
PRASENA	— his brother;
BHANGAKARA	— his elder son;
SATYABHAMA	— his daughter;
MUGI	— Satyabhama's foster-mother;
JAYASENA	— a young Yadava chief;
SHATADHANVA	— a Yadava chief and follower of Satrajit;
URVASHI	— Satyabhama's pet cat;
MENAKAA	— Urvashi's child.
JAMBAVAN	— the king of the bear-world;
SAMBA	— his grandson, the holy man of the bear-world;
ROHINI	— his daughter.
ANANTA	— the Cosmic Serpent.

SATRAJIT'S DAUGHTER

It was nearing midday.

Satrajit's mansion, painted in white, was the most spacious in Dwaraka, with a verandah running all round it. Near it, on its extensive grounds, on the shores of the sea of Saurashtra, stood small houses and huts for dependants and servants, a large stable for horses and a larger one for cows.

Satyabhama—Satyaa as she was generally called—was returning to her father's mansion by the back-door. The door opened into the courtyard of the temple built by her father in honour of his guardian deity, the God Surya (the Sun-God).

Satyaa was small and plump. Her face, normally fair and glowing like a white lotus, was now pink with heat and exertion. There was a voluptuous grace in her movements: and a flashing brilliance in her dark eyes.

Her heart was singing; she felt it was the happiest moment in her life. She looked at the waves of the sea which lashed against the shore and felt that they were dancing to express her own happiness.

There was no one in the *antahpur* (the women's apartments). Her stepmothers—she had lost her mother in her infancy—and the other womenfolk of the family were busy in the front courtyard, serving their meal to her father, his guests and the Brahmans officiating at the sacrificial session which was being held in the mansion.

Stealthily Satyaa entered the room in which the pots and vessels for water were kept, and restored the gold-plated pots, which she had carried away with her, to their proper shelves.

There was no use in joining her stepmothers while the menfolk were dining, for joining them now would make her recent absence from the house conspicuous. She went to the verandah, sat on a swing suspended by chains gilded with gold, whistled and called softly 'Uri.'

Urvashi, called by the family 'Uri,' came into the room with majestic steps, looking like a bunch of white blossoms walking on four white legs. Satyaa extended a friendly hand; Uri climbed on to her knees, put out her tongue and fixed her bright green eyes on her mistress.

'Uri, do you know who has come?' asked Satyaa. She got no answer, but an affectionate "mi-aaow." She framed the cat's face between the palms of her hands and whispered: 'We have seen him today, Uri!'

There was no response from the cat. Uri was not interested in what Satyaa had seen or done; she was hungry and had been waiting for her mistress to return in order to join her at her meal as usual.

Satyaa slapped her gently. Uri mewed unhappily. 'Listen, idiot,' said Satyaa, whispering into the cat's ear, 'he smiled at me and I smiled at him.'

In joyful excitement, Satyaa began to swing furiously, continuing to stroke Urvashi, who settled down on her lap with eyes closed, resigned to the prospect of starving till her mistress decided to go for her meal.

Satyaa went over the events of the morning, her imagination painting various pictures of what had happened. She had succeeded in joining the Yadava young ladies who, with water-pots on their heads, had mingled with the crowd gathered at the city gates to give a ceremonious welcome to Krishna, Balarama and other Yadava *atirathis* returning to Dwaraka after having won spectacular victories in Aryavarta.

It was wrong of her father, she thought, not to have taken part in the reception, and not even to have allowed the members of the family to do so. There was rejoicing all over Dwaraka and there was no sense in her family not joining in it.

She knew all about the exploits of Krishna. She had avidly heard the reports about them, which no one in Dwaraka was tired of repeating: how Krishna had brought the Five Brothers, the sons of Emperor Pandu, who had been burnt alive by the wicked Duryodhana, to life; how single-handed he had induced Jarasandha, the mortal foe of the Yadavas, to leave Draupadi's *swayamvara*; how he had helped the Five Brothers to win the proud daughter of King Drupada; how he had kept the promise he had given to the dying Bhanumati, the wife of Duryodhana, that her husband would rule over Hastinapura; how he had helped the Five Brothers to build a great, new city, which was named Indraprastha.

Most of the people in Dwaraka, hearing these reports, shared the view that Krishna was almost a god; but not her father and his friends and a section of the Yadava families who looked upon him as their leader. They openly laughed at what they heard. Satyaa felt very hurt at their derisive comments.

She was also in distress at her father's hostile attitude towards Krishna. He even held the venerable King Ugrasena in contempt, and made no secret of his attitude.

Her father had very good reasons for hating these proud chiefs, she told herself. They were all envious of his wealth and the hold he had over many of the Yadava chiefs.

In order to cement the bond between the highly placed Yadava chiefs and himself, he had even made an offer that she should marry Yuyudhana, the son of Satyaka, a powerful chief allied to Krishna's family. The offer was unceremoniously rejected. Her father's pride was mortally wounded, and, since then, he had been taking every step to humiliate anyone he could from an exalted family.

However, Satyaa was glad that Yuyudhana's father, Satyaka, had rejected her father's offer. She did not fancy the young man, handsome and brave though he was. She wanted to marry Krishna, son of

Vasudeva, the most influential Yadava chief.

She dared not mention her intention to her father or stepmothers. She knew that they would not dream of offering her to Krishna, to whom her father attributed every misfortune that had overtaken the Yadavas.

She had thought over this problem almost daily. In fairness, she felt, her father was justified in his attitude. He was the richest Yadava in Dwaraka; his mansion was the most opulent; his horses and cattle were the finest. Above all, her father was, of all the Yadavas, the one most favoured by the God Surya, the guardian deity of Prabhasa Tirtha. As a token of his special grace, the god had given him the *Syaman-takamani*, the magic jewel, which, if properly worshipped, would transmute base metal into gold.

In spite of her affection for her father—and she was his most beloved child—she could not forget Krishna; nor would she ever miss an occasion to see him.

She had made her choice when she was six years old and seen Krishna wrestling with his maternal uncle Kamsa in Mathura. Her fancy, in childhood, had been so struck with him that, when playing with her friends, she had always called herself Krishna Vasudeva.

Krishna haunted her; often he would appear to her in dreams, wooing her as a bride. Sometimes the dreams were so passionately vivid that, when she woke up perspiring, she felt ashamed that a well-brought-up maiden like her should have such ugly dreams; however, that never stopped her from praying every night that Krishna might come to her again in her dreams.

When she grew up, her resolve to marry Krishna became an irresistible urge. She felt convinced that he would never be happy without her: she alone could make him an ideal wife, share his greatness and give him joys which no other woman could offer.

As the years passed by, the possibility of her marrying Krishna began to fade. Her father and the major Yadava chiefs became estranged more and more.

She took her elder brother, Bhangakara, into her

confidence about her intention. Knowing the nature of the relations between their father and the major chiefs, he laughed at her entertaining such a foolish dream. But she was a strong-minded young woman; she would not give up her decision. She decided upon a campaign to win Krishna, unaided by the members of her family.

When Krishna accepted Yudhishtira's invitation from Hastinapura and prepared to go North with most of the *atirathis*, she decided upon taking the initiative.

She confided in Kritavarma, son of her mother's sister and Krishna's great friend. Through him she also rendered help to Krishna by supplying horses and arms without his knowing it. Her father's stud-farm was so extensive and his store of arms so plentiful that it was not difficult to supply them by stealth.

Then luck favoured her. She learnt that her father had employed the young chiefs led by Jayasena, who gathered round her uncle Prasena to gamble, drink and enjoy a pleasant life at her father's expense, to kill Satyaki before he joined Krishna's mission.¹

She could easily imagine the motives her father had for doing away with Satyaki who was Krishna's ablest lieutenant—one was to take revenge on him for rejecting her hand in marriage; the other, to frustrate Krishna's plans.

She made a counter-move. She got the retainers devoted to her to kidnap Satyaki before he was assassinated by Jayasena and his friends. She did not want Krishna to be deprived of his services in the adventure he was embarking upon. She also supplied to him horses, chariots and equipment without her father's permission. In return she took a promise from Satyaki to help her in furthering her ambition to win Krishna. Now, two of his best friends were pledged to support her.

Much as she tried, she could make no progress with Krishna's wives: Rukmini, the Princess of Vidarbha, treated her with guarded and distant cordiality; the other, Shaibya, Princess of Karavirapura, treated

her as a little child. Her attempts to win his mother's favour also failed. That she was her father's daughter always came in the way of her being accepted as a friend.

Satyaa would not accept defeat. She succeeded in winning the friendship of Krishna's younger sister, Subhadra, a frank, jovial and vivacious girl. She was flattered by the effusive friendship of a maiden older than herself. This enabled Satyaa to learn all about what was happening in Krishna's family.

Her father would not join in welcoming the returning heroes; he also did not want any member of his family, or of the families of those chiefs who were friendly to him, to take part in the rejoicings. She was shrewd enough to see that her father had started the sacrificial session only four days before the reception so as to give him and his friends an excuse for not being present.

However, she herself was determined to go and receive Krishna. Now that he had returned in glory and with a halo of divinity, she must begin an active campaign to woo him, if necessary braving her father's wrath.

Early this morning, accompanied by Subhadra, Satyaa had joined the procession of young Yadava women going to take part in the reception. These women had all brought their copper pots, and Satyaa enjoyed their envious glances at her own gold-plated ones. However high their families might be in the Yadava hierarchy, her family was the richest in Dwaraka.

It was very unfair on the part of the Yadava chiefs to treat her father as an inferior. Especially, it was very foolish of the stupid old Akrura, when he came here some months ago, to have insisted, in Krishna's name, that her father should send to the Five Brothers one-fifth of his horses, chariots, cattle and gold. Her father had said—and rightly—that the Yadavas were not feudatories of the Five Brothers to send them such a lavish tribute.

Why should her father part with his possessions which were acquired by him through the grace of the God Surya? The wealth that he possessed was not to be given away to the sons of Pandu.

From that day, her father and his friends had incurred the deep resentment of the major Yadava chiefs. It was not her father's fault. Poor men always envied the riches of the wealthy.

Anyway, Satyaa joined Subhadra in the women's procession. When it reached the city gates, the women lined themselves on two sides, singing songs of welcome. The Brahmans chanted *mantras* and showered rice, invoking the blessing of the Gods on the heroes. It was a sight which she could not forget.

The Yadavas, headed by Krishna and Balarama, got out of their chariots and met King Ugrasena, Vasudeva, Satyaka and others. Then she saw him! How handsome he was; how youthful! The way he wore his dress and ornaments made all the rest look as if they were wearing other people's clothes.

Her heart throbbed violently. She would have liked to fall at his feet; she would have loved to be a part of him.

When the procession passed through the town, Subhadra leading the women, the streets were crowded with onlookers. She noted that all the leading Yadava chiefs were there, except her father, her uncle Prasena and other friends.

Her memory raised vivid visions of what had happened.

When the procession ended at the mansion of Vasudeva, the people who had gathered to form the procession, dispersed. Subhadra ran up to Krishna, dragging her too by the hand. When she approached Krishna, she handed her pot to a woman standing by and like a little child fell into Krishna's arms.

This effusiveness had shocked many of her elders.

At her age—Subhadra was fifteen—she should not have acted in that way in the presence of her elders.

She should have bowed low and wiped the dust from his feet.

Krishna caressed her head, twisted her ear and said: 'Subhadra, you are growing very fast.' Oh! how wonderful his voice was, how sweet, how affectionate!

Krishna then looked at her at the exact moment when she happened to look at him. They were standing near each other and she found it difficult to restrain a half-formed urge to fall into his arms!

For a long time, she had found her moments of joy only when she saw him in her dreams; that was her deepest secret. Now, in his actual presence, she felt alive to the roots of her being and found him more intensely real than any other man she had ever known.

At that moment, her imagination ran riot. He had lived in the hearts of the *gopis* of Vrindavan; in the hearts of Radha, Rukmini, Shaibya; even in those of Bhanumati and Draupadi; but at that moment she had felt that he lived in her heart as no man had ever before lived in a woman's heart.

At that moment she felt a surging emotion come over her and the conviction that he *was* a god. There were no battles he could not win; no enemies he could not overcome; and she had to be his wife, whatever it cost.

Satyaki, who was standing by him, asked: 'Do you know this young maiden?'

'I remember having met her before,' replied Krishna with a smile so sweet that Satyaa blushed, 'but I do not know whose daughter she is.' Then he added: 'I only know her now as the maiden with the golden pots.'

'Govinda, don't you know her?' interjected Subhadra. 'She is my friend, Satyaa, the daughter of the noble Satrajit.' Krishna turned to Satyaki who was standing next to him and asked: 'Oh, that is the girl who kidnapped you?'

Then looking at Satyaa as if amused, he said: 'Well, young lady, I have heard of many kidnappings—I kidnapped Vaidarbhi myself—but you are the first woman to kidnap a hero like Satyaki.' Krishna laughed

merrily. The laugh was a song, Satyaa felt.

She was so embarrassed, she could not utter a word and contented herself with shooting a dazzling glance at Krishna from her lowered eyes. Krishna did not respond as she expected.

Krishna turned to Subhadra. 'Now, go, Subhadra. I have to pay my respects to Mother.' Then he looked at her. 'Daughter of Satrajit, it has been a kind action of yours to come to receive us. I have not seen your father and uncle for a long time. I will come over to your house to pay my respects to them.'

Satyaa then felt humiliated at the way her father and uncle had been behaving. Why did her father start the sacrificial session four days before Krishna returned? Why could he not have sent her uncle or brother Bhangakara to the reception?

One thought followed another as Satyaa went on swinging vigorously, patting Urvashi mechanically, lost in the vision of Krishna and the way in which he had smiled.

Suddenly, the chain of her thoughts was broken, as a maid-servant came in. She stopped swinging. The cat jumped from her lap to the ground and snarled at the maid, her tail high in the air.

The maid-servant said: 'The noble lord wants to see you immediately.'

'O, Great God!' Satyaa uttered to herself.

She had forgotten all about changing her festive clothes and removing the extra ornaments she had put on for the reception. But her father would grow very angry if she kept him waiting. She adjusted her dress and followed the maid.

URI, THE CAT

Satyaa faced her angry father with an air of being in mortal fright. She was familiar with her father's angry moods and knew it was a sure antidote to look crushed.

Satrajit, her father, now in his sixties, was tall and powerfully built; he must have been a strong man in his younger days, though his muscles had now gone flabby and his belly bulbous through luxurious living.

He had a dignified presence, a well-trimmed beard and a head which was growing bald. He had lost two of his front teeth, and, whenever he snarled, which was not unoften, his mouth assumed an ugly shape.

Prosperity was writ large in his ostentatious dress and his gold ornaments—his wristlets, armlets and rings. His girdle, a broad band of gold, was studded with jewels.

His necklace was made of three gold chains ending in a knot, from which was suspended the famous *Sya-mantaka* jewel—an egg-sized diamond of roseate hue. It was believed that it had been given to him by the God Surya (Sun God) himself as a token of his favour. When duly worshipped by Satrajit at the place where the god had given it to him, it was said to have the property of transmuting base metal into gold. According to her father, it was the source of his prosperity.

Many people also believed him to be the favourite of the God Surya and stood in awe of him.

Satrajit was seated on a gold-encrusted seat. The floor was carpeted with bear-skins. His back was as straight as a rod in spite of his years.

As soon as he saw Satyaa coming, he dismissed

his eldest son, Bhangakara, and the preceptor of the family with a wave of his hand.

Satyaa, without being told, understood what the trouble was. The Brahmans who officiated at the sacrificial session had gone, in company with the high preceptor of the Yadavas, Gargacharya, to the reception of Krishna and Balarama. The session had been delayed; the midday meal had had to wait till they returned. This had upset her father and he was evidently upbraiding his son and the family preceptor for this interruption.

After they had gone, Satrajit looked at Satyaa, rolling his eyes, as was his habit when he wanted to overwhelm someone with the weight of his anger.

Satyaa prostrated herself before him in salutation, watching him warily with lowered eyes. Then she stood up, her hands joined, the very picture of humility.

‘Come up to me,’ Satrajit ordered.

She obeyed the order, looking demure.

‘Sit down,’ shouted Satrajit in a harsh voice.

She sat down, saying: ‘As my venerable father commands.’

‘Where have you been?’ he asked her, again rolling his eyes.

She gave no reply, and continued to keep her eyes on the ground.

‘Tell me the truth,’ roared Satrajit, slapping his thigh to indicate that he would stand no nonsense.

‘Subhadra, the daughter of the noble Vasudeva, pressed me to go with her,’ replied Satyaa with the air of making an honest confession, though it was the other way about.

‘Where to?’

‘To the reception,’ replied Satyaa meekly.

Satrajit’s angry eyes were fixed on her. After a little pause, he exclaimed: ‘You joined the reception!’

Satyaa nodded her assent, without looking up.

‘To see that beggar Satyaki!’

Satyaa suppressed a chuckle; her father did not suspect her real motive for joining the reception. ‘No,

father,' she replied, her head still bowed.

'Look up,' ordered Satrajit.

She looked up and squeezed a few tears out of her eyes.

'You are mad after that fellow.'

Satyaa did not utter a word. It was no use disillusioning her father as to why she had gone to the reception.

'You are a shameless girl,' said Satrajit, knitting his brows. 'Two years ago you kidnapped Satyaki and, like a thief, stole my horses, chariots and equipment to hand them over to him.'

Satyaa looked at her father in an appealing way and replied: 'Father, I only did it to save you from the wrath of Balarama; he suspected that you had had Satyaki assassinated. You know how dangerous Balarama can be when his ire is roused.' And, after a pause, she added: 'I had to produce Satyaki before the venerable King Ugrasena to clear you of the charge.'

'It is true that you saved me from an awkward situation,' conceded Satrajit, 'but you have forgotten that, after that incident, I told you to have some sense of decency and not go kidnapping young men whom you happen to fancy. As my daughter, you should avoid getting mixed up in such ugly affairs.'

'Yes, father, I should,' said Satvaa meekly.

'What is the use of saying "Yes, father" every time? On that occasion, you promised me that you would leave the matter of your marriage with Satyaki entirely to me,' said Satrajit.

'Yes, father; so I did,' Satyaa replied.

'You don't seem to have any self-respect. That arrogant old blackguard Satyaka insulted me and the whole of my family,' Satrajit continued in a severe tone. 'He had the effrontery to reject my offer to give you in marriage to his son.' His lips were curled in a snarl. 'He thinks that his son is too high-born to wed my daughter.'

'Yes, father.'

'I am sick of hearing your "Yes, father",' said

Satrajit. Satrajit had the habit, when angry, of raising his voice abruptly, so that the other person might be frightened.

'You humiliated me then; you have humiliated me today' he shouted, rolling his eyes as he struck her.

Satyaa let herself go and began to shed copious tears. Then, covering her face with her scarf, she began to sob piteously—sobs were always at her command; they were a sovereign remedy to mollify her father.

Urvashi, the cat, had followed Satyaa from the *antaipur* and waited impatiently for her at the door. However, when she heard her mistress's sobs, she evidently thought that it was time for her to intervene. She stalked into the room with slow, majestic, but skillfully padded steps, never so much as casting a glance at the master of the house. She approached her mistress, stood with arched back and bristling tail, and expressed her opinion of Satrajit by a loud, contemptuous "mi-aow."

Satyaa found it hard to suppress her laughter at Urvashi's performance.

Her father looked at the cat and, boiling with rage, addressed his daughter: 'Satyaa, how many times have I told you to drive this wretched creature out of our house?' His anger was now diverted to Uri.

'Father, what can I do?' said Satyaa helplessly. 'Every time you have told me to drive her out of the house, I have carried out your orders. But she is shameless.' Every time I send her out, she roams all over Dvaraka, herding with stray cats—Satyaa blushed at the cat's promiscuity—and returns at midnight so dirty that I have to wash her clean. Oh! She is horrid!' She picked up the cat and fondly cradled her in her arms.

'Then drown her in the sea,' said Satrajit.

'Oh, father,' said Satyaa piteously. 'Please, please, don't ask me to do that. Uri is a good cat; she loves me, she also holds you in great respect; only she has a bad temper. How could I drown her?'

Satrajit did not know what to say or do; whether to seize the cat and throw her out himself or forget her and resume his angry conversation with his daughter.

'Anyway, take her out of my sight,' said Satrajit peremptorily.

Obediently, Satyaa went to the door, left the cat outside the room and returned.

Her anticipation proved correct; by the time she came back, Satrajit's feelings had softened.

'Now, Satyaa, listen once and for all,' said Satrajit trying to recapture the sternness with which he had been talking to her before Uri intervened. 'If you interfere in my plans about Satyaki again, I will whip you,' he added, passing a hand over his beard.

'Father, I give you a solemn pledge,' replied Satyaa, in a serious tone. 'I will have nothing to do with winning Satyaki as my husband.'

'It is for me, in my own way, to bring the proud Satyaka to accept you.'

'Yes, father,' she said, and, after a pause, added: 'I give you a solemn pledge.'

She cheerfully gave the pledge. Satyaki had no chance with her, whatever her father did to further the match.

She was prompted to chuckle at the way she was behaving. Her father did not know that old Satyaka would not accept her and that Satyaki himself had sworn to help her win Krishna.

When Satyaa, with bowed head, gave his assurance, the shadow of a smile passed over Satrajit's face. In his own way, he had loved the motherless child from her infancy and could never bring himself to be angry with her for long.

His mood now changed. He continued, by way of explanation: 'These Yadava chiefs are very proud; they treat us as if we were their dependents. Don't you worry; I will break their pride. Somer or later, you would be Satyaki's wife.'

'Now you can go. Your mothers must be waiting

for you,' added Satrajit, with a smile at having succeeded so well in bringing his daughter to her senses.

Satyaa rose to leave, but seeing her father smile, made a move in her campaign to win Krishna. In the most affectionate tone she could command, she asked him: 'Father, do you know what Vaasudeva said?'

'Which Vaasudeva? Balarama or Krishna?'

'Krishna.' Satyaa managed to utter the name with some semblance of self-possession, though her throat was choking with emotion at the bare sound of it.

'He is a fraud,' replied Satrajit, with asperity. 'He continues to pass himself off as a god. I am going to show him for what he is.'

'Father, he wants to be a friend,' said Satyaa.

'What do I care, whether he is my friend or not?' commented Satrajit, but could not resist asking: 'How do you know that?'

'He himself told me so. When Subhadra told him who I was, he said: "I shall be coming some day soon to pay my respects to your father, the noble Satrajit."'

'Don't you believe a word of what he says,' said Satrajit contemptuously. 'His words are sweet, but his heart is full of venom. He has ruined the Yadavas, and put them to endless trouble since they accepted him as their leader. I will deal with him now in my own way; wait a little.'

'But father, we could never have come back to Mathura, had he not killed the tyrant Kamsa.¹ We were also able to escape Jarasandha's wrath because of him.'²

'Don't you believe all that nonsense,' said Satrajit. 'He killed his uncle Kamsa to save himself and his family. He brought us all to this wilderness to escape being handed over to Jarasandha himself. If he had surrendered to Jarasandha, the Yadavas would have lived happily in Mathura,' added Satrajit. 'Because of him, our ancestral home in Mathura was reduced to ashes.'

'Father, every one says that he can work miracles,'

said Satyaa, with an air of childish innocence.

'Don't you tell me that,' Satrajit asserted emphatically. 'He puts on airs; he talks fascinatingly. I know him well enough by now. Very shortly, I will teach him a lesson which he will never forget.'

As Satyaa prostrated herself before her father in salutation, he caressed her head and said: 'Satyaa, trust me. Within a few weeks, I will get Satyaka to come to me begging that you may be given in marriage to his son—and on my terms. Then you will have Satyaki as your husband,' he added with a smile.

'May I know what your terms will be, father?' asked Satyaa, and continued in a persuasive way: 'If I knew them, it would enable me to understand the situation better.'

'He must dissociate himself from Krishna,' said Satrajit. 'I will get him to do that. Don't underestimate your father's power. No one can outwit him,' said Satrajit proudly, and smiled again as his daughter left the room.

AN EMPTY WORLD

When Satyaa left her father, she had a smile on her lips. She had enjoyed the joke: her father was convinced that she was set on marrying Satyaki.

However, she was worried about the next move in the game. She thought that it could only be decided in consultation with Satyaki; by now he would be able to report progress in his mission of winning Krishna for her.

She joined her stepmothers and the other women of the house at their midday meal. In the afternoon, she went to the temple of the God Surya (Sun God) built by her father, where she had already arranged to meet her friend, Subhadra.

She liked Subhadra. Her complexion was as dusky as that of her brother, Krishna. She was vivacious, full of laughter, very lovable, and was fast emerging into adolescence.

Satyaa grabbed Subhadra by the hand and took her to the path around the shrine which worshippers used for their ritual walk around it.

'Subhadra, I want your help,' said Satyaa in a whisper as they began to walk along the path. 'I want to meet Satyaki very urgently. Kindly ask him to meet me this very evening.'

'He will be busy meeting his elders and friends to-day,' replied Subhadra. 'But why are you so impatient to meet him? Can't you wait for a day?' she asked and pinched Satyaa playfully, glancing at her mischievously.

'Subhadra, you are a fool if you think that the noble Satyaka would accept me as his son's wife,' said Satyaa.

'I know, I know what you mean. You want to marry Satyaki in spite of his father's opposition,' said Subhadra, patting Satyaa's back.

Satyaa, in an appealing voice, said: 'Please, Subhadra, get Satyaki to meet me today. The matter is very urgent. I can't wait till tomorrow.'

'The impatient love-lorn maiden wants to meet her lover!' said Subhadra, bursting with laughter.

Satyaa was on the point of breaking into tears. 'Let me assure you, Subhadra, I don't want to marry Satyaki. I have selected my husband already and I am going to win him. Please help me.'

Subhadra's eyes danced merrily. 'I know how cunning you are, Satyaa. Whom do you want to marry?'

Satyaa evaded a direct reply. 'I don't want Satyaki as my husband; that I am sure of. If you want him for yourself, you can induce noble Vaasudeva to send a message to his father.'

Subhadra blushed and said: 'I don't want to marry him either. Brother Govinda has told me—it is a secret, but I will tell you—that he has already selected a husband for me.'

'Who is he?' asked Satyaa.

'He did not tell me that. But I am sure that if he selects a husband for me, the man must be worth having,' replied Subhadra.

'That is a good girl,' said Satyaa, patting Subhadra on the back. 'But, please arrange me a meeting with Satyaki. As I told you, it is a matter of life and death,' she added.

When Subhadra saw tears beginning to swell in Satyaa's eyes, she clung to her. 'I can't see you so miserable. If it is so very important for you, I will bring Satyaki. But where can you meet him?'

Satyaa thought for a while. 'Ask him to come to Kritavarma's house when the lamps are lit.'

'My mother will never allow me to go out after dusk,' said Subhadra.

'You need not come yourself,' replied Satyaa. 'I will tell you all about it later.'

Subhadra's curiosity was awakened. 'But what is it that you want to talk to him about so urgently? I won't be a mere messenger. You must let me have your secret.'

'I would not trouble you to arrange the meeting, were it not of very great importance. It might affect your brother also,' said Satyaa in a low voice. The only way to induce Subhadra to bring Satyaki immediately would be to say that it affected Krishna.

Subhadra went pale. 'Is it some conspiracy of your father's? Is Govinda in danger?'

'I don't think so,' replied Satyaa.

A new idea dawned upon Subhadra. With her eyes dancing, she asked: 'Do you want to marry Govinda?'

'Why do you say that?' asked Satyaa.

'I could see this morning when you met Govinda that you were making eyes at him shamelessly. Tell me the truth. Do you want to marry him?' asked Subhadra.

Satyaa evaded a straight reply. 'Do you think that Vaidarbhi and Shaibya would ever let your brother marry me? You are my friend, the best friend that I have. Give me a promise that you will help me to marry the man of my choice.'

'No one could be a better husband for you than Satyaki, if his father accepts you. But you prefer someone else. Who is he?' Subhadra asked again.

'Please don't press me. I will tell you all about him in a few days. But I repeat that I am going to marry him and no one else.'

Subhadra looked at Satyaa for a little while and burst into irrepressible laughter. 'I am sure you are longing for my brother Govinda. I can see in you all the symptoms of a maid pining for her lover, and soon you will join the crowd of young women who have broken their hearts for him without so much as getting a smile from him in return.'

'What has led you to think that, Subhadra?' asked Satyaa.

‘All I want is to warn you,’ replied Subhadra. ‘He is a very difficult person to deal with. Both Vaidarbhi and Shaibya find it very very hard to live up to his expectations.’

Satyaa smiled slyly. ‘I would love to marry a difficult person.’ Then she corrected herself. ‘Your brother, Govinda, is not the only difficult person in Dwaraka.’

‘All right, all right,’ said Subhadra, patting Satyaa on the back. ‘Keep your secret to yourself. You always ask me to tell you my secrets, but you won’t tell me yours. That is very unfriendly of you!’

They finished going round the shrine and left the temple.

When Satyaa went to the house of her mother’s sister to meet Kritavarma, she was in a happy mood.

Kritavarma, surrounded by the members of his family, was telling them about the exploits of the Yadava *atirathis* in Aryavarta, and particularly those of Krishna. She joined the family circle and avidly heard what he had to say about them. When there was a break in the conversation, she jested with Kritavarma.

While talking to Satyaa, Kritavarma lowered his voice and added: ‘Go to the rear verandah. He is waiting for you.’

Very soon, Satyaa took leave of Kritavarma’s mother and went to the rear verandah of the mansion.

The lamps were lit in the mansion, but the rear verandah was enveloped in semi-darkness. Satyaki was waiting for her, leaning against a pillar.

‘Satyaki,’ called out Satyaa in a low voice.

‘I am here,’ replied Satyaki.

‘It was very nice of you to introduce me to Krishna this morning. But what about your promise to me? Have you kept it?’ asked Satyaa eagerly.

‘Satyabhama, I have kept my promise to you,’ replied Satyaki. ‘Again and again, I tried to interest him in you, but I have failed. He was patient, sympathetic, but not by one flicker of his eye-lid did he evince any interest in you. That is impossible now.’

'Impossible!' exclaimed Satyaa, her heart beginning to sink. 'Why do you say so?'

'You know how observant he is. No sooner did we arrive in Dwaraka, than he noticed that the Yadava women were not wearing their gold ornaments as they generally do on festive occasions. He also remarked that your father, uncle and brothers were not there,' said Satyaki.

'Oh, they were all busy with the sacrificial session,' said Satyaa.

'Do you think that that would deceive Govinda? Your father could have postponed the session for next month.'

'Oh, Great God!' exclaimed Satyaa.

'He also did not fail to observe the change in the attitude of the Yadava chiefs whom he met,' continued Satyaki. 'Though they all felt happy at his arrival, there was an air of subdued resignation about them.'

'And what did he do then?' asked Satyaa.

'After paying his respects to his mother, he, accompanied by Uddhava and myself, went to the mansion where the noble Vaidarbhi and Shaibya ceremoniously received him at the door-step. After some preliminary talks, he asked them why they and the other women had not worn their ornaments as they usually did on festive occasions. They left it to Uddhava to explain the reason,' said Satyaki.

'What did Uddhava say?' asked Satyaa.

'I will quote you Uddhava's very words. He told Krishna: "You told Uncle Akrura and me to come to Dwaraka and bring one-fifth of the horses, chariots, cows and gold which the Yadavas are making a gift of to the Five Brothers. Accordingly we came here." Do you want me to tell you all that Uddhava said?' Satyaki asked Satyaa.

'Yes, please tell me all that happened. Don't you see my very life depends upon his goodwill?' said Satyaa.

'Then, listen,' resumed Satyaki. 'You know how, when we approached your father and his friends, they

refused to part with their share of the possessions.'

'Yes, I know, when the venerable Akrura and you met Father, I was listening from behind a closed door,' said Satyaa. 'What did Uddhava say?'

'He explained that your father and his friends would not give anything. To make up their share, some Yadavas had to contribute as much as half of their possessions, while our families, that is, King Ugrasena's, the venerable Vasudeva's and ours, made up the deficit by parting with all we could. Mother Devaki, Vaidarbhi and Shaibya gave most of their ornaments; they were determined to fulfil Krishna's pledge to the very letter.'

'Oh, Great God! Was that so?' cried Satyaa.

'Didn't you see that the women-folk of the Yadava chiefs had very few ornaments on them?' asked Satyaki. 'On the other hand, you were fully decked out.'

'What did Krishna say then?'

'Krishna listened to Uddhava patiently. His lips were set and his eyes were severe. He asked Uddhava why he had not told him about this earlier when he came to Indraprastha with the Yadavas' share of the gifts. Uddhava replied that uncle Akrura and he did not like to expose before Aryavarta that some of the Yadavas would not carry out his wishes,' said Satyaki.

'Was he very angry with my father?' asked Satyaa with a sinking heart.

'All that he said was: "I now understand",' replied Satyaki.

'What will happen to me?' asked Satyaa.

'After that, none of us could make any suggestion to him about you.'

'But he was very nice to me this morning,' said Satyaa, clinging to a dying hope.

'That was before he knew the situation.'

'What shall we do now?' exclaimed Satyaa in distress.

'Well, I don't think we can possibly do anything. If I were you, I would give up any hope of winning Krishna,' said Satyaki.

Satyaa went home, crushed under the wreckage of her shattered dreams. *He* would never accept her. Her father had closed all possible approaches to win him.

She scarcely heard that Uri was mewling. The cat was waiting for her patiently, ready to join her at her evening meal. She went to the kitchen and brought some milk for Uri. She herself had no appetite. Now that there was no Krishna for her, she felt a void in her heart and she went to bed but not to sleep.

Uri was sleeping soundly near Satyaa's bed. But she opened her eyes as soon as Satyaa began to sob, and, standing on her hind legs, placed one of her paws in Satyaa's hand. Automatically, Satyaa extended her hand and, by its aid, Uri climbed into the bed and snuggled near her mistress.

Her body shaking with convulsive sobs, Satyaa hugged Uri and moaned: 'No marriage! No Krishna! Uri, the world is empty.'

Bhangakara, passing along the verandah and hearing Satyaa sobbing, stepped in. He came up, placed an affectionate hand on her head and asked: 'Why are you crying?'

'I want to die,' said Satyaa, as if her heart would break. 'Krishna won't look at me.'

'Didn't I tell you before that you were living in a fool's paradise? I wonder what we can do to win over Krishna. It is not possible.'

'I know, I know, I know,' said Satyaa, and, burying her head on her pillow, began to cry.

THE RAJYA SABHA OF THE YADAVAS

The Rajya Sabha of the Yadavas of Dwaraka was convened by King Ugrasena for the next day.

The Yadavas of Dwaraka were a hardy race of warriors who, when there was no war to fight, devoted themselves to agriculture and cattle-rearing. They specialized in breeding horses which, apart from being a symbol of status, were indispensable in war; their strength and vigour were maintained time and again by holding chariot races when there was no war.

The ruling hierarchy of the Yadavas comprised heads of clans and *atirathis*, chariot warriors of the highest rank, whose ranks were replenished from time to time by those who attained to the highest proficiency as chariot warriors in war or in the chariot races.

An *atirathi* was the head of a self-sufficient little battalion of *maharathis* and *rathis*, mostly recruited from promising youngsters in his family each with grooms, attendants, and a relay of horses and bullock-carts carrying equipment and provisions.

Under Krishna and Balarama, the Yadava *atirathis* had become a highly trained force, famed throughout the land. They had defied the wrath of Jarasandha, the Emperor of Magadha, the sworn enemy of the Yadavas of Mathura. When he threatened Mathura with destruction from all sides, the Yadavas, led by Krishna and Balarama, had migrated to Saurashtra, founding the City of Dwaraka.

About two years ago, Krishna and Balarama had gone to Aryavarta with fifteen *atirathis* and their respective followers. Two *atirathis* did not leave with them: Bhangakara, the eldest son of Satrajit, and Shatadhanva, his loyal friend.

Satrajit, in his youth, had risen to the rank of a *maharathi*, but was never able to attain to the status of an *atirathi*.

King Ugrasena, the head of the Andhaka clan, had convened the Rajya Sabha with the view not only of welcoming the returning heroes, but also of hearing authentic reports of their achievements in Aryavarta. Now that the *atirathis* had returned to Dwaraka, it was also necessary to fix an early date for the chariot race.

The Rajya Sabha was held in the mansion of King Ugrasena. It lacked the pomp and ceremony of the Rajya Sabha held by the Kurus in Hastinapura, or by Drupada in Kampilya.

The floor was covered by skins of bears and antelopes stitched together. On the side of the room facing the entrance was a raised seat covered by a lion's skin, and reserved for King Ugrasena.

There were four other seats, two on each side of the royal throne. The seat to its right was reserved for Vasudeva, the father of Krishna and Balarama, the most eminent of the chiefs, and the head of the Shoora clan; the one next to it was reserved for Gargacharya, the royal preceptor. To its left, one seat was reserved for the pious and highly respected chief, Akrura, and the next one for Satyaka, the father of Yuyudhana Satyaki and the head of the Vrishni clan.

By usage, the four Yadava chiefs—all *atirathis* in their young days—and Gargacharya, the royal preceptor, took precedence over all the others.

The Brahmans entitled to attend the Rajya Sabha, sat next to Gargacharya.

A little further away from the royal throne and on both sides, seats were provided for the others, with a passage between them. The front row of these seats to the right was reserved for the *atirathis* with their respective *maharathis* behind them. The seats to the left were reserved for senior *maharathis* unattached to any *atirathi*, and other important Yadavas.

A little before the arrival of King Ugrasena and others, for whom seats had been reserved in the centre,

Satrajit came into the hall, attended by his eldest son, Bhangakara, and Shatadhanva and Jayasena, the two young chiefs who were his favourites.

He was resplendent in his gold ornaments, with the *Syamantaka*, or magic jewel,—a magnificent, scintillating diamond, roseate in colour,—suspended by three gold chains from his neck.

The *atirathis* were entitled to wear high-domed diadems with a crest of their choice. The *maharathis* wore diadems without a dome. However, the diadem which Satrajit wore, though it had no dome, was studded with brilliant jewels, proclaiming opulence and attracting attention.

When Krishna, Balarama and other *atirathis*, with their respective *maharathis* and followers, had left Dwaraka for Aryavarta, Satrajit decided to advance his status among the Yadavas, *atirathi* or no *atirathi*. His ships, which ploughed the distant seas, were bringing him immense wealth. The *Syamantaka* given him by the God Surya (Sun God) meant that he would have as much gold as he wanted.

Satrajit looked at the assembled Yadava chiefs with an air of superiority and acknowledged their greetings by a condescending smile.

His son, Bhangakara, as an *atirathi*, took his seat in the front row to the right of the royal seat.

As soon as Satrajit entered the hall, his eyes searched for Krishna. There he was, occupying the second seat in the front row of the *atirathis*, talking to a group of friends.

Shrewd and calculating as he was, Satrajit for the first time acknowledged to himself that, though he was richer by far than most of the leading Yadavas, he had found himself thinking of Krishna again and again, wondering what his reaction would be to the status he had attained in his absence.

Again and again, he looked at Krishna and could not help noticing the lack of formality in the way he took his place, his simple but distinguishing ornaments, his care-free look, his brilliant smile, the affectionate

understanding with which he looked at his friends; above all, the air of superlative elegance which surrounded him.

The chamberlain announced the arrival of the aged King Ugrasena and the venerable Vasudeva. All the chiefs, except Satrajit, stood up to receive the King as he came into the hall with his right hand on the shoulder of his daughter's son, Brihadbala, the brother of Uddhava. Satrajit made a symbolic gesture of courtesy by making as if to rise from his seat just as the King was about to sit on his throne; having made it, he sat down.

Then followed Vasudeva, fair and dignified, his greying beard and hair framing a face which had once been very handsome. His good nature and native dignity were reflected in the way he responded to the greetings of the assembly.

Gargacharya, the old preceptor, followed. His brow was wrinkled and lofty. He acknowledged the greetings of the assembly by extending his right hand in blessing.

Akrura followed him, pious and gentle, with a friendly smile for all.

Satyaka, who came after him, was lean, tall and muscular. With his commanding presence, his piercing eyes, his long aquiline nose and his proud mien, he was every inch a warrior.

When all had taken their seats, King Ugrasena, looking at the *atirathis*, said: 'My sons, let me welcome you, *atirathis* and *maharathis*. We have heard reports of your great achievements in Aryavarta. Let the Rajya Sabha know how you have fared and what you have achieved.' He looked pointedly at Krishna. Krishna asked his elder brother, Balarama, to speak.

'Venerable elders, we have brought glory to the Yadavas of Saurashtra,' said Balarama with a broad smile. 'First, we went to Pushkara and, due to Govinda's skill, it was restored to the *atirathi* Chekitana, even without our twanging our bows.'

'*Sadhu, sadhu,*' said King Ugrasena. Vasudeva's

eyes were riveted on his sons with pride.

Balarama continued: 'Then we heard that the Five Brothers, together with their mother, Aunt Kunti, had been burnt alive at the instance of Duryodhana.'

'Are you sure it was Duryodhana?' asked Vasudeva.

'Yes. The Yaksha, who was engaged by Duryodhana to perform this sinister deed, confessed that to King Drupada,' replied Balarama.

'What a horrible deed!' commented Gargacharya.

'Uddhava, here,' Balarama pointed to Uddhava who was sitting next to Krishna, 'traced the Five Brothers to the Land of the Demons. How he went there and how he managed to escape from the Rakshasas, is more than I can say.' Then he chuckled. 'Uddhava's nature led him to marry two Naga princesses; both are twins and I am sure even he is not able to distinguish one from the other, not only at night, but even during the day!' he said and roared with laughter. Even the elders could not restrain bursting into a laugh, but Uddhava sat with his eyes modestly cast on the ground as everyone looked at him.

Then Balarama continued: 'Govinda redeemed the promise that he had made to King Drupada that his daughter, Krishnaa, would be suitably married at a *swayamvara*.'

'Wonderful! How did that happen?' asked Ugrasena.

'Our enemy, Jarasandha, was there too, ready to win the test if possible or to kidnap Draupadi if necessary. But he left the *swayamvara* after he had viewed the target. Govinda met him alone at night and achieved this result. I have never been able to understand how he could have done it,' said Balarama.

'Oh, I forgot one important thing,' he chuckled again. 'Our brother, Bhima, married a Rakshasi in the Land of the Demons and had a son by her,' he said and laughed irrepressibly; the laugh was infectious. 'You know, venerable King, what that means,' he added.

'No, we don't know,' replied King Ugrasena.

'Bhima's son is the eldest of his generation and would be entitled to succeed to the throne of the Emperor Shantanu.' Balarama paused and, suppressing his laughter, exclaimed: 'A Rakshasi's son on the most powerful throne in Aryavarta!'

Everybody laughed.

'But there would be one difficulty,' continued Balarama, his eyes full of merriment. 'How would the big crown of Shantanu fit his hairless head? As he has no hair on his head, he has been named Ghatotkacha —the man with a head as hairless as a pot.'

After the laughter subsided, Vasudeva said: 'Tell us something more of what you did.'

'Then Arjuna won the test. The other kings were going to attack him, but Govinda and I went to his rescue. But there was another difficulty,' said Balarama.

'Evidently, there is no end to your difficulties, said Satrajit with a sneer

Balarama looked at him with scorn. 'We have not been living ingloriously at Dwaraka hiding behind our women-folk; we challenged the God of Death every moment of our life.'

Everyone in the assembly looked at Bhangakara and Shatadhanva, the two *atirathis* who had stayed at home.

Before Satrajit could retort, Vasudeva intervened: 'Let us listen to the whole narrative.'

Balarama, without looking at Satrajit, continued: 'Then the Princess of Panchala was married to all the Five Brothers.' He could not suppress another chuckle.

'How could King Drupada agree to such a sinful marriage?' asked Satrajit with a sneer.

'It was not a sinful marriage,' said Balarama curtly, annoyed at this interruption. 'The venerable sage, Veda Vyasa, than whom there is no higher authority on *Dharma*, approved of it. Such a practice was common in some of the Arvan tribes in the Himalayas. Govinda also approved of it.'

Satrajit snorted in contempt.

Vasudeva again intervened: 'How was the friendship between the Kurus and the Panchalas achieved?'

'That is where Govinda comes in again,' said Balarama, patting Krishna's back. 'Vidura, the wisest minister of the Kurus, came with presents from King Dhritarashtra and the venerable Bhishma, and invited us all to Hastinapura. We never dreamt that Govinda would bring about a friendship between Drupada and the Kurus. However, he did so.'

After a pause, Balarama continued: 'Then we all went to Hastinapura. There was a magnificent reception. Duryodhana was woebegone; he threatened to commit suicide and asked his brothers to leave Hastinapura, if Yudhishtira was crowned Emperor of the Kurus in Hastinapura.'

'How was that tangle solved?' asked King Ugrasena.

'Govinda was at it again, scattering promises, right and left,' replied Balarama, looking at his brother with mock contempt. 'He promised Duryodhana's dying wife that her husband would rule in Hastinapura; he promised Bhima that he would be Crown Prince in his own right; he kept all his promises. A fratricidal war was averted. The Five Brothers cheerfully marched off to Khandavaprastha with half the wealth of the Kurus and all the presents which King Drupada has given to his son-in-law. We went with them. And what was an exile for them was turned by Govinda into the triumphant march of a victorious army.'

'At the expense of the Yadavas!' interrupted Satrajit again with a sneer.

Balarama's face was flushed with anger. Before he could explode, Krishna intervened in the soft tone he always used when faced with an angry voice. 'The Five Brothers are our *Bhagineyas*. We had to give them a present.'

Satrajit said contemptuously: 'You say that the Five Brothers were given half the wealth of the Kurus.'

Besides they had the presents given by Drupada. Was it necessary for us to give them such lavish presents?' he asked.

'Necessary? Yes, it was,' replied Balarama, without even looking at Satrajit. 'The Yadava *atirathis* had worked wonders in Aryavarta, brought about peace and friendship between the Kurus and the Panchalas, and won an empire for the Five Brothers.'

After a pause, Balarama continued: 'We became the arbiters of the destiny of Aryavarta. At such a time, we could not afford to be niggardly. Govinda suggested that we should give one-fifth of our possessions.'

'Did he consult you?' asked Satrajit.

'Of course, he did. He never does anything without my permission. But there is one thing about Govinda that I have to complain about, venerable King,' said Balarama addressing Ugrasena.

'What is it?' asked the King with a smile.

'I cannot recover from the surprises which he springs upon me every moment,' said Balarama, casting an affectionate glance at Krishna. 'You don't know where you are with him. He creates difficulties and solves them, gives promises and keeps them, and gives me credit for doing things of which I know nothing. I want him to be punished, venerable King,' added Balarama and placed a loving hand on Krishna's shoulder.

'I still cannot understand why such lavish presents were given to the Five Brothers, to the ruin of the Yadavas,' reiterated Satrajit.

Krishna pressed Balarama's hand significantly. The latter understood the message and let Krishna reply: 'It is the price that we have paid for being accepted as the architects of *Dharma* in Aryavarta.'

'That is all right, Krishna,' said Satyaka. 'But the presents which we gave had rather an unfortunate effect on the Yadavas. Many of them were impoverished. Those who did not pay their share were the only gainers.'

‘What do you think will happen to us now?’ asked Satrajit truculently.

‘Just exactly what we deserve,’ said Krishna.

‘You have crippled our resources. If Shalva invades us, we shall be crushed. We will have no place on earth in which to hide ourselves,’ said Satrajit.

‘Who will dare to face us if we are ready to die for *Dharma*?’ replied Krishna.

‘But with what shall we fight? We have few resources left,’ said the aged chief who was sitting next to Satrajit.

‘Wealth without readiness to part with it for *Dharma* is evil,’ said Krishna.

Satrajit, seemingly indifferent, attentively listened to what Krishna had to say; it was not difficult to guess that the reference was to him.

The assembly, apprehensive of what would happen, heard Krishna’s remarks, partly in fear, partly in hope. All these days, by his truculent conduct and offensive way of speaking, Satrajit had enforced a tacit understanding among the chiefs that his conduct should not be referred to in the Rajya Sabha. Now Krishna had directly raised the question.

Satyaka, who had been following this conversation, interjected: ‘But suppose it is a tool in the hands of someone who has siezed it, what then?’

‘Venerable Uncle, wealth is not an evil if it is the product of virtue, properly earned and used,’ said Krishna.

‘Wealth may be the product of virtue, but we know that it does not produce virtue,’ added Satyaka bitterly.

A frown was on Satrajit’s brow, but he did not want to continue the discussion of this matter in the Rajya Sabha.

‘I have learned by bitter experience,’ continued Satyaka, ‘that wealth and virtue never go together.’ Then he added: ‘What would you call a man who thinks himself the equal of the gods because of his vast possessions?’ The chief had been the hardest hit because he had contributed all that he had towards

the deficit created by Satrajit's failure to pay his share.

Everyone looked at Satrajit, who laughed in scorn.

'I would call him *asura*, a demon,' said Krishna with a laugh.

All the other members of the assembly were struck dumb. However much they enjoyed Krishna's outspoken criticism, it made them apprehensive of an open split in their ranks.

'Whether the man who has possessions is a god or a demon makes very little difference to us who have become poorer to enrich the Five Brothers,' said the old chief.

'Have you?' asked Krishna with a smile. 'You are mistaken. Whatever wealth we gave to the Five Brothers is an investment in righteousness. For righteousness they suffered a fate worse than death; they have established Indraprastha only to vindicate it. We are now their partners in whatever they do to vindicate *Dharma*.'

Satrajit felt that the position that he had acquired among the Yadavas by intimidating them was being challenged and, rolling his eyes, he said in a loud voice: 'What have we to do with the Five Brothers? We have earned our wealth ourselves. We enjoy it ourselves.'

'Noble Satrajit,' said Krishna, with a trace of sternness in his voice, 'wealth used to inflate one's importance or provide pleasure is theft.'

'Well said, Govinda,' interjected Balarama in a challenging voice.

Satrajit thought that in the Rajya Sabha, where strict decorum had to be observed because of the presence of the most respected of the Yadavas, any exhibition of ill humour would make him look ridiculous. Unable to control his rising temper, he said offensively: 'I am under no obligation to pay a tribute to the Kurus or to anyone else in any sort or form.'

When he saw that Satrajit had gone beyond all reasonable bounds, Balarama was angry; his face was flushed.

‘Tribute!’ exclaimed Krishna before Balarama could retort. ‘It was no tribute that we paid. It was the greatest investment which we, the Yadavas of Dwaraka, could make in order to strengthen the Aryan way of life.’

Satrajit snarled: ‘It is heartless to impoverish your own people.’ Then he paused, controlled himself and said: ‘Well, we will talk it over some time.’

Krishna asked coolly: ‘What else have I been doing all this while except talking to you?’ Then he added: ‘If you want to discuss the matter further with me, I will come to you tomorrow after the morning rituals are over. I am sure, when we have spoken, you will make good the loss which the others have suffered on account of your failure to part with your share.’

Satrajit got up from his seat, his eyes rolling, and shouted insolently: ‘I will not permit anyone to sit in judgment on my conduct.’

‘And we will not let you behave grossly in the presence of the noble King,’ retorted Balarama and made a move to rise from his seat. Krishna pressed his hand to indicate that he would reply to Satrajit.

Most of the members of the assembly expected that Krishna would retort angrily, but they were mistaken. He laughed as if he was amused at Satrajit’s remarks. ‘Noble Satrajit, perhaps you will think differently after I have spoken to you,’ he added.

Vasudeva whispered in King Ugrasena’s ear and the King raised his hand asking for silence. ‘I think it is time that we should dissolve the Sabha for today. We will hold the chariot race on the full moon day of next month.’

SATRAJIT OFFERS A DEAL

Satyabhama was all excitement when she retired to bed, and could not close her eyes. She went on whispering into Uri's inattentive ear: 'He is coming, he is coming.'

On his return home from the Rajya Sabha, Satrajit had announced to the members of his family and the Brahmans officiating at the sacrificial session that Krishna was coming to meet him the next morning. He made no secret of the fact that he would deal with Krishna in the way he deserved.

There was excitement in the family. Most of its members were happy at the thought that Krishna would bring about an understanding between Satrajit and Satyaka.

Satyabhama, even when she fell asleep for a while in the morning, continued to hear the echo of only one refrain: 'He is coming, he is coming.'

When the morning rituals were nearly over, she thought of waiting for him at the gate. She simply dared not do so; it would be the height of impropriety.

In her impatience, all that she could do was to go about the house, singing snatches of her favourite songs in a low tone. Everything looked brighter and happier; the house was a thing of beauty; the pillars appeared to be dancing for joy.

She knew that she looked very attractive in white clothes. So she dressed in white, wearing the best ornaments that she could find. Impatience gripped her heart. Every moment that she had to wait for him appeared to be an age.

For a moment an idea seized her. Her father might offer her in marriage to Krishna himself as a

gesture of peace. The next moment she realised how fantastic that idea was; if Satyaka would not accept her as his daughter-in-law, much less would Krishna's father, Vasudeva.

Then she was in a panic. No one could possibly help her—neither her father nor her brother, nor even Satyaki on whom she had relied so far. She was doomed to a lonely life—no, worse than that. Her father might give her in marriage to Jayasena or Shata-dhanva. That would be terrible; suicide would be better.

She waited and waited with only Uri by her side and cursed the cat for her wicked indifference to what would happen to her mistress.

He came. She saw him coming in by the front gate. Her heart was full of joy. Only with great difficulty could she control her impulse to run to welcome him. Her father and her brother, Bhangakara, went to the gate to meet him, but there was no warmth in their greeting.

She was glad to see him informally dressed. The ornaments he wore were few. He carried no arms, not even his famous *Sudarshana Chakra*, which was always slung from his shoulder when in public. All this showed that he came as a friend to bring about peace between her father and the Yadava chiefs.

He responded to her father's salutation by joining his palms, but avoided his embrace. The officiating priests stood up, chanting benedictions and showering grains of rice on him. He made an offering of a cocoa-nut at the sacrificial fire.

Then her father led him to the verandah in the rear, which was his favourite place for meeting people.

The womenfolk were disappointed that they could not see the two of them talking to each other. Several of them, however, went to the rooms opening out on the verandah in the rear to see Krishna through the chinks of the closed doors and hear the talk between Krishna and Satrajit.

Satyaa, with Uri following, went to the room, the

door of which opened on the verandah close to the place where her father and Krishna would be sitting.

From the chink in the door, Satyaa saw her father pointing out, with a lofty air, the cattle-sheds and the meadow beyond, where horses were grazing. "Why can't my father assume a friendlier attitude?" she asked herself.

Satrajit made a sweeping gesture with both his hands to indicate his vast possessions. He added: 'Some day, Vaasudeva, you will find me performing the *Aswamedha* (horse sacrifice).'

'*Aswamedha*?' asked Krishna, a little surprised. 'Do you aspire to be a *chakravarti*?'

'Such has been the mandate of the God Surya,' replied Satrajit. 'I am rearing a couple of horses which are consecrated and will be ready for *Aswamedha* in a couple of years. They will lead me to power greater than that of a *chakravarti*.'

Krishna smiled at Satrajit's boastfulness.

They moved towards the portion of the verandah where it was carpeted with bear skins. Satrajit invited Krishna to take his seat and then took his own, each leaning back on a separate bolster. The *Syamantaka*, blazing in splendour as it reflected sunshine, looked as if a miniature sun had risen in all its glory.

There was a moment of silence between the two which Satrajit broke in a patronising tone: 'Vaasudeva, I noticed yesterday how anxious you were to talk to me. Tell me, what made you come to see me?'

'If you want the reason, I will give it you,' replied Krishna, taking no notice of the superior air which Satrajit had assumed. 'In a way, I was eager to meet you. I want to see that there is harmony between the Yadava chiefs and yourself.'

Satrajit smiled. 'That could have waited. There must have been some other motive which lent urgency to your visit.'

'You are right, noble Satrajit,' said Krishna in a friendly tone. 'I had a motive which affects you very much.'

'Affects me!' exclaimed Satrajit. The smile on his face was replaced by a determined look. 'Nothing affects me. I never give in.'

Krishna smiled and in a very persuasive tone replied: 'Perhaps I could be some help to you straightening matters out between you and the other chiefs, in particular the noble Satyaka.'

'Help!' exclaimed Satrajit and added with a touch of scorn: 'I see that you have come here to make one of your sensational conquests.'

'Yes,' replied Krishna frankly. 'I have come to conquer your heart. Will you let me?'

Satyaa watched the eager look on Krishna's face and hoped that her father might respond to his friendly attitude.

'I know what you are up to,' said Satrajit, raising a warning finger at Krishna. 'You want me to make good the loss that the Yadava chiefs have suffered by my refusal to carry out your orders.' There was a touch of mockery in his voice.

'It was not an order, only a request,' said Krishna. 'If you make good the deficiency, it will be a triumph for *Dharma*, not for me.'

Satrajit laughed contemptuously. 'I like your frankness, Vaasudeva. You also will have to hear some home-truths from me.'

'That is why I have come, to talk frankly,' replied Krishna. 'I did not come here to speak or listen to ceremonious platitudes.'

'Then, listen,' said Satrajit with a determined look. 'My possessions are acquired by the grace of the God Surya.' He touched the *Svamantaka* suspended on his chest with his fingers and applied them reverentially to his eyes. 'I will not part with them to anyone.'

'I suggest you think it over before finally making up your mind,' suggested Krishna.

'I only think once; I do not believe in thinking twice. My possessions are my own and no one can take them from me,' said Satrajit. His eyes, as usual with him, began to roll, his jaw set in determination.

'Don't you ever think of anything but yourself?' asked Krishna quietly.

'Why should I?' asked Satrajit.

'In your view, there are no other things higher than your own pleasure,' said Krishna. His tone was serious.

'I only think of my happiness; let others think of theirs.'

'What are you after?' asked Krishna. 'Haven't you had enough?'

'The God Surya gave me the *Syamantaka* to increase my prestige and my pleasure; to make me and my family happier than anyone else; to give lavish gifts to the Brahmans so that they may pray for my welfare; and, as I told you, to perform sacrifices on a scale that no one else has done before.' He paused for a moment. His lips were curved in a frightening snarl, exposing the loss of his front teeth. '.....And to destroy my enemies,' he added with emphasis. 'You despise wealth; I don't.'

Krishna smiled. 'I have never despised wealth; I despise those who use it for their pleasure.' Then, after a pause, he added: 'Spending one's possessions on oneself appears to be so miserably senseless to me. Perhaps you will agree that *Dharma* also has a claim over the possessions given to us by the favour of God.'

'Vaasudeva, didn't I make the position clear? My *Dharma* is to increase my possessions beyond the dreams of man, so as to enjoy life more than anyone else has done,' said Satrajit proudly.

Krishna was silent for a while. The smile on his face disappeared. 'Don't you think that there is something higher than satisfying your vanity?' he asked.

For a few moments, Satrajit looked angrily at Krishna and then said: 'Vaasudeva, you may be a god, as some of your flatterers think you are. But I do not want to hear comments on my conduct even from you.'

Krishna countered the anger reflected on Satrajit's face by a look of amusement. 'The sooner you acquire

the habit of hearing comments, the better for you,' he said. 'If that is your final reply, there is no sense in my being here with you. But I may remind you that the Yadavas will vindicate *Dharma*,' he added.

He adjusted his scarf carefully and was rising from his seat in order to leave, when Satrajit's face underwent a sudden change. Like a versatile actor, his face was wreathed in smiles, as he made a gesture requesting Krishna to resume his seat.

After Krishna had re-seated himself, Satrajit said: 'Vaasudeva, I don't know what the *Dharma* of the Yadavas is or even your own *Dharma*, and I do not want to know. But I can see that you are out to secure from me what the other Yadavas contributed towards my share.'

'I am glad you see that,' replied Krishna.

'Vaasudeva, I will show you the ways by which you can fulfil what you describe as your *Dharma*. There are only two ways open to you,' said Satrajit. He paused and continued: 'One way is for you to invite a conflict between me and the other Yadavas. When I heard that you were returning to Dwaraka, I prepared myself for such an event....' With a proud gesture, he indicated his meadow in which powerful horses were grazing.

'I know that you are prepared for a conflict,' said Krishna, and then spoke slowly and deliberately, weighing every word: 'If a conflict is forced on the Yadavas, we will face it, if *Dharma* so demands, and you can take my word for it that you *will not* win.' Then he continued: 'Let me know what is the other way that you are suggesting.'

'The other course is to give me the price that I want for giving my share of my possessions,' replied Satrajit.

'Let me know what price the Yadavas have to pay you,' said Krishna. 'You do remember, don't you, that you are now offering a deal?'

'Yes,' replied Satrajit. 'My price is not difficult to pay. I want my daughter Satyaa to be married to

your friend, Yuyudhana Satyaki. Your father and you both have tremendous influence over his father, Satyaka. Induce him to accept my daughter in marriage.'

Behind the doors, Satyaa almost fainted as she heard the bargain which her father was proposing. She opened the door a little wider, not to miss a single syllable of the fateful conversation.

'Satyaki himself may not be prepared to marry your daughter,' said Krishna.

'That is your affair,' replied Satrajit indifferently. 'He is your best friend. Induce him to accept Satyaa as his wife. She will make a good wife, I assure you.'

Satyaa felt that her life now hung on Krishna's reply. A silent prayer rose in her heart: 'Oh, Krishna, they say that you are a god. Please, please, hear my prayer and save me from being Satyaki's wife.'

Krishna looked at Satrajit for a few moments and then, with deliberation, said: 'Have you tried to find out why the noble Satyaka refused your offer of Satyaa?'

'I know it only too well. The old fool thinks that he is powerful and can humiliate me. In his eyes, I am a sort of outcaste; he thinks my daughter is not as highly born as his son is. I want to break his conceit,' said Satrajit.

'Possibly you may be mistaken. There may be a different reason altogether,' said Krishna.

KSHAATRA DHARMA

THE CODE OF HEROIC RIGHTEOUSNESS

Satrajit looked at Krishna, with his eyes rolling, and said: 'You want to know why I am out to break Satyaka's arrogance? It is the mandate of the God Surya. He humiliated me before the world by rejecting my daughter, as if his son was too big a prize for her. There could be no other reason for rejecting my daughter.'

Behind the door, Satyaa was waiting for Krishna's words with agonising impatience.

'Noble Satrajit, think of how you have brought up your daughter. I only saw her for a few moments at the reception. She is a good young woman....'

Satyaa bent down and whispered into the ears of Uri: 'I am a good woman, he says.'

'.....You have brought her up in luxury,' said Krishna. 'You have passed on to her your gift of showing off your wealth.'

'Why do you say so?' asked Satrajit.

'When she came to the reception,' said Krishna, 'it did not strike her that bringing gold-plated pots, when all the others had copper pots, would hurt their self-respect....'

Satyaa felt as if she received a slap in her face.

The idea that her carrying the gold-plated pots would offend others had never struck her.

'....We are a warrior race, the choicest Kshatriyas of Aryavarta. We have a high tradition of *Kshaatra dharma*. We dedicate our life to heroic ends associated with righteousness. We train our children to prepare for such a life. Does your daughter, brought

up as she is, even know the song *Farewell by a Hero's Wife* which every Kshatriya's wife takes a pride in singing?"

Satrajit snorted in contempt and said: 'It seems that you people are perfect. Well, let us hear you out.'

Krishna continued: 'You must also remember that the noble Satyaka is the finest embodiment of *Kshaatra dharma*,—the code of heroic righteousness—recognised as such throughout Aryavarta. All his life he has stood for upholding the code. We all learnt to practise it under his inspiration and with him as our ideal.'

'I know what he is. He is a pauper,' said Satrajit.

'Poverty is no crime, no badge of inferiority. But you know how he invited poverty,' continued Krishna. 'You were responsible for it.'

'I! If I was, I had good reason for it.'

'No. He taught you and others a lesson in heroic righteousness,' said Krishna. 'He handed over all his possessions to the Five Brothers to make up the deficiency created by you. It was this gesture which led the other Yadavas to stand up to you and cheerfully part with more than their share of that deficiency.'

'Well, I give him a chance to acquire wealth if he accepts my daughter,' said Satrajit.

'He would scorn to gain wealth by bartering away his son,' said Krishna.

'That is part of his conceit—and yours,' sneered Satrajit.

'This conceit, as you call it, is the life-breath of heroes. How can a young woman, brought up in luxury and addicted to pleasure, ever be reconciled to the strict ways of the noble Satyaka's family? And how can the members of Satyaka's family, men, women and children, who live for *Kshaatra dharma*—men ready to face death with a smile and women loyal to their husbands in life as in death—ever live in harmony with a young woman like your daughter?' asked Krishna.

'My daughter may change. Or, as is more likely,

by her influence, she may change Satyaki,' replied Satrajit.

'You have guessed rightly. That was the calamity from which Satyaka wanted his son to escape,' said Krishna.

'As I told you, she is a good girl. I love her more than my other children,' said Satrajit.

'If you love your daughter as you say, have you considered what she will feel when she comes to know that you have sold her to satisfy your vanity?' asked Krishna.

Satrajit proudly retorted: 'I arrange marriages for my children for their welfare, not to satisfy my vanity.' He paused and continued: 'Vaasudeva, we are drifting very far from what we were talking of. Answer me: Are you prepared to pay the price that I demand?'

'I know its significance very well,' replied Krishna. 'You want to blackmail the noble Satyaka or rather all of us.'

Satyaa was all attention, but she could only hear her heart-throbs in her ears.

'It is not blackmail, Vaasudeva. Everything has a price in this world, even *Dharma*, which you say you want to vindicate,' said Satrajit sarcastically.

'You think of everything in the terms of bargain. However, there are a few things which cannot be bought or sold,' said Krishna.

Satyaa's heart jumped for joy. 'Come to my rescue, Govinda. I will always remain your slave,' she said in a silent prayer.

'You claim to be frank; so will I be. Everything in the three worlds has a price,' said Satrajit.

Krishna was silent for a moment as if weighing his words before uttering them. Then he spoke with detachment: 'Noble Satrajit, you have been humiliating King Ugrasena and the Yadava chiefs by your ostentatious display of your cows, your horses, your farms and your gold. You forced the Yadavas into making good your share of the presents for the Five

Brothers. You are now preparing to overawe the Yadavas by your wealth, your henchmen, and the horses which you are training for an armed conflict. The noble Satyaka's rejection of your daughter has been a mortal blow to your prestige. That is why you are prepared to trade your daughter to re-acquire it.'

'Vaasudeva, sometimes I like you; you see things so clearly,' said Satrajit sarcastically.

'Yes, I have seen things clearly,' said Krishna. 'Everything has a price for you.'

Satrajit nodded assent.

Krishna paused for a while and said with an amused smile: 'I have caught your infection, noble Satrajit. I am in a mood to make a little bargain myself.' His smile was charmingly innocent.

'Make it by all means,' said Satrajit. 'Then we can understand each other better.'

'You want your daughter to be wedded to Satyaki. Well, are you prepared to pay the price that I want?' asked Krishna.

'Yes. Tell me what price I have to pay for acquiring Satyaki as my son-in-law. Don't beat about the bush,' said Satrajit with impatience.

'Don't get ruffled, noble Satrajit,' replied Krishna quietly. 'You started the bargaining; I am doing it now.'

Satyaa's heart sank. What deal would Krishna offer? 'Oh, Krishna!' went up her silent prayer, 'don't let my father sell me to satisfy his vanity or buy his prestige.'

What is the price that you want?' asked Satrajit.

Krishna said quietly, pointing his finger at the resplendent jewel suspended from Satrajit's neck, which looked like a burning flame issuing from his chest: 'Hand over your *Syamantaka* to uncle Akrura; he is the one who looks after the royal treasury.'

Satrajit could not believe his ears. His face was flushed. He glared at Krishna, rolling his eyes. 'You want my *Syamantaka*?' he asked in an indignant tone.

'Don't get angry,' said Krishna with irritating cool-

ness. 'You made your offer; I rejected it. I have made mine and you are free to accept or reject it.'

'Never, never will I part with the gift which the God has given me,' said Satrajit raising his voice.

'Just now you said that you love your daughter very much. You would like her to be the daughter-in-law of the noble Satyaka. Well, *Syamantaka* is a small price to pay for marrying her into the family of Satyaka, one of the distinguished families among us,' said Krishna.

'*Syamantaka, Syamantaka!*' repeated Satrajit, still unable to believe that any one could have the courage to ask for it. 'Never, never will I part with it.'

'Well, then, my offer is rejected,' replied Krishna. 'Do I understand you correctly?'

'Your suggestion is preposterous,' said Satrajit in rising anger. 'The God gave it to me, not to the Yadavas. I have my responsibilities to Him.'

Krishna smiled in amusement, which irritated Satrajit all the more. 'Gods don't give gifts to pamper the vanity of man; they give them for all.' Then he added: 'We can release you from your responsibilities.'

'I don't want to be released,' said Satrajit offensively.

Krishna smiled indulgently. 'Anyway, I am going to release you, whether you wish it or not.' He continued: 'In your own interest and in the interests of the Yadavas, *Syamantaka* should be with uncle Akrura, not with you.'

'How will you take it from me? I challenge anyone—even you who pretend to be a god—to take *Syamantaka* from me,' said Satrajit.

'You will have to give it all the same,' said Krishna, and added: 'What if King Ugrasena orders you to do so?'

'Let him try,' was the curt answer. Then Satrajit, abruptly raising his voice, added: 'I shall fight every one of you, if you want me to give up *Syamantaka*, and shall win in the end.'

'Perhaps my advice will be unpalatable, noble

Satrajit,' said Krishna quietly. 'In your own interest, give up *Syamantaka* to uncle Akrura. This jewel will ultimately ruin you.'

'Ruin me, son of Vasudeva!' exclaimed Satrajit. 'Your triumphs in Aryavarta,—if you have won any at all—have turned your head,' added Satrajit, almost rising from his seat in excitement.

Krishna looked amused. 'Don't worry about my head, but yours can only be saved by giving up *Syamantaka*.'

'Do you threaten to kill me?' shouted Satrajit.

'No, I want to see you alive,' said Krishna with a smile. 'Remember this: I would not have demanded *Syamantaka* unless I had decided to take it.'

Krishna's smile was so irritating that Satrajit's rage boiled over. His fingers curled and uncurled in convulsive clenchings. His eyes became bloodshot. He looked ferocious. Suddenly he jumped from his seat, placed his hands on Krishna's shoulders and began to press him backwards on the bolster. 'You want to take *Syamantaka* from me!' Then he repeated again: 'You want to take *Syamantaka* from me! The curse of the God Surya will fall on you.'

Satyaa was shocked to see what her father was doing. He was a very strong man and, when aroused, could strangle a man with his bare hands. Only a few days before, she had seen him throttling a disobedient, defiant servant with his bare hands. She also knew that he always carried a dagger suspended from his girdle.

She flung open the door and saw the murderous glint in her father's eyes. A loud scream escaped her lips. She was shaking in every limb and heard her own voice, 'Father, don't, don't,' which she felt was the echo of her screams in the air.

The great Govinda, the vanquisher of Kamsa and Chanura, the irresistible warrior, the beloved of the Yadavas, the arbiter of empires, was being murdered by her father!

Then her eyes fell on Krishna. His arms were

held stiff and slanted back; he was grasping the two ends of the bolster, not to support himself, but to prevent his own hands from hitting her father!

There was no sign of struggle on his face, not even excitement; he was looking at her father with eyes unaffrighted, brilliant and steady. She saw the artery beating under the skin of his throat, and yet there was a faint smile on his lips—a smile of indulgence at the pranks of a child.

She felt terrified as it dawned on her that the stiffness of his body and his holding the ends of the bolster so firmly were the outcome of a self-control maintained by a superhuman will. He had decided not to resist her father's murderous attempt by force.

She ran up to her father and, with all the force that she could command, pulled away his hands which were pressing Krishna against the bolster.

'Don't protect me from him,' said Krishna with a smile. She felt it an order that had to be obeyed.

Krishna sat motionless, and as her father removed his hands from his shoulders, she saw his hands giving up their hold on the bolster.

Her father sank into his seat helplessly, though murder was in his eyes.

Uri had followed Satyaa to the verandah, sniffing the air with complete indifference. She walked up to the place where the three were sitting and quietly sat down near Krishna, her green eyes fixed on him. Krishna glanced at the cat and moved his hand indulgently over her soft, white fur. She purred with delight.

In a few moments, the doors of the room were opened and the womenfolk of the family came in timidly, looking at the three sitting almost together.

Satyaa sat near her father, who looked drained of all energy, affectionately holding one of his hands which was trembling with excitement. His face reflected utter exhaustion. Rills of perspiration ran down his chest and his forehead was beaded with it.

When they heard Satyaa's scream, Bhangakara and Shatadhanva also ran up to see what was happen-

ing. Several Brahmans who were officiating at the sacrificial session, rushed to the verandah and stood behind Bhangakara, shocked at Satrajit's conduct towards Krishna.

There was an intense silence for a few moments.

Then Krishna said: 'Noble Satrajit, you are right, but only within the limits of your ignorance. When your ignorance is lifted, you will be the first to admit that *Kshaatra dharma* has to be upheld if life is to be lived well.' He got up and adjusted his scarf which had fallen on the bolster.

Satrajit was so furious that he could not give any reply, though he tried to speak.

'Noble Satrajit, I will go now. I am sure, when you are less excited, you will see the wisdom of the course I have suggested. If *Syamantaka* is not in the hands of the venerable Akrura by sunset tomorrow, I will take it,' said Krishna in a voice as inexorable as fate's, and, joining his palms to all in salutation, he left the verandah.

Bhangakara accompanied Krishna to the gate.

Uri followed Krishna and, at parting, received an affectionate stroke from him, to which she responded by a friendly "mi-aaow."

A STRANGE HAPPENING

Satyaa sat, holding her father's hands, which were trembling with excitement. She could see that the murderous passion which had gripped him was subsiding, and being followed by a confused state of mind. Her stepmothers and step-sisters had gathered there in silent helplessness, mixed with vague apprehension.

After a few moments, Satrajit, as if suddenly awakened from a nightmarish dream, looked around, touched the *Syamantaka* with his fingers and applied them to his eyes out of sheer habit. 'Satyaa, take me to the temple,' he told Satyaa in a husky voice.

'Yes, father,' she said.

He placed his hands on Satyaa's shoulder and allowed himself to be led to the temple of the God Surya through the private gate.

As directed by him, she took him to the *garbhagriha* (inner shrine) of the temple and asked the priests to go. The priests left and she closed the door.

All the time, Satrajit in a low voice was reciting the mystic *gayatri mantra*, invoking the God Surya. When the door was closed, he prostrated himself before the deity, carved on the surface of a stone, driving his chariot of seven horses.

He then asked Satyaa to leave the shrine, by a wave of his hand. She went out of the room and waited outside.

After about a *ghatika* (24 minutes), Satrajit came out of the inner shrine. He was no longer confused; he was slowly becoming his old self again.

'Let us go for our meal,' he told Satyaa.

She was glad that her father was his usual self, though he lacked the self-assurance which he had

always had before. He joined the Brahmans and the male members of the family at the meal. It was an uncomfortably silent affair. The incident of the morning oppressed the minds of all.

After her meal, Satyaa retired to her room, which she shared with three of her step-sisters. Uri, who had had a very hearty meal with her mistress, followed her. Then, as was her habit, Satyaa washed the cat thoroughly, cradled her in her arms and retired to bed for a siesta.

Uri snuggled herself by her side and Satyaa, her heart overflowing, spoke to her in a whisper: 'Uri, you are very selfish. You went to see him off and did not even take me.' She pinched the ear of the cat who mew-ed happily.

Satyaa continued to whisper into her ears: 'Listen, idiot. He said that I was a good young maiden. What do you think, Uri? I was thrilled when, trying to remove Father's arms, my hands touched one of his shoulders . . . It was very selfish of you to appropriate him. He stroked your back and made friends with you, while he had nothing to say to me He did not speak to me.

'No, I am wrong; he did. He told that I should not have gone to the reception with gold-plated pots. It was foolish of me to parade our wealth He was right. I do not remember all the lines of the *Farewell by the Hero's Wife*

'Uri, we must improve ourselves. We must know more about wives who observe *Kshaatra dharma*. It was foolish of me not to have mastered the code of heroic righteousness. I must do something heroic. But I have no idea how it can be done.' Then she gave vent to a deep sigh. 'I am hopelessly inadequate, Uri. I thought of giving him pleasures beyond any that could be imagined. But he has condemned pleasure. I never thought that I was so bad.'

After Satyaa got up from her bed, she began to dress for her usual visits to the temple and to her

mother's sister, Kritavarma's mother. As she was dressing, the incident of the morning rose vividly before her eyes: of her father shouting 'the curse of the God Surya be on you,' and pressing Krishna back against the bolster; of Krishna's arms slanting back, his hands gripping the bolster, his body stiff; of the supreme expert in body combat keeping his impulse to hit back under strict control. She was not sure whether even the gods could have maintained such supreme self-control as he did when he was assaulted by her father.

His words 'I will take it' echoed in the corridors of her mind. Was he going to take the *Syamantaka* by force or steal it? A fantastic idea flashed through her mind. Suppose she took the *Syamantaka* from the worship-room and handed it over to him? She laughed at herself. She could not do it, for her father, when awake, always wore the *Syamantaka* and at night slept on the steps before the little worship-room in which it was kept.

Before going to the temple, she could not resist going to her father's room on the pretext of enquiring after him. He was offering worship to the *Syamantaka*, which was placed on a little platform in front of him.

As she went from the temple to Kritavarma's house, she found groups of people standing in the streets or sitting on the verandahs, talking excitedly to one another. She could guess what they were talking about. No sooner did they see her than every one of them became silent, looking at her with threatening eyes.

When Satyaa reached Kritavarma's house, the members of his family surrounded her, asking her whether the rumour was well founded that Krishna had called upon Satrajit, her father, for him to make good his share which had been paid by the other Yadavas; that Satrajit had tried to murder Krishna; that she, Satyaa, had intervened and stopped her father

from manhandling Krishna; that, while departing, Krishna told her father that he must hand over the *Syamantaka* to the venerable Akrura before sunset the next day.

Satyaa had to admit that the rumour was well founded. Kritavarma was angry, his mother indignant. It was an unpardonable affront on the part of Satrajit to manhandle Krishna, the hero and saviour of the Yadavas.

The rumour and the excitement among the people of Dwaraka made Satyaa miserable beyond words. When she returned home, she found that the members of her family were subdued, speaking in low whispers as if a great calamity was impending.

Satyaa spent her night in bleak despair. The incident that had happened that morning had completely destroyed any possibility of Krishna's accepting her as a bride. There was nobody to whom she could turn for help; nobody's advice she could seek. Her life, her hopes, her dreams were all crushed under the weight of her father's ugly behaviour.

The next day, the rumour, passing from mouth to mouth, reached fantastic proportions.

Satyaa sent a message by her maid to Subhadra to meet her at Kritavarma's house. When, in the afternoon, she was going there, she came across little crowds in the streets, armed with swords, their eyes full of anger. She could also see at a distance how the Yadavas, deeply shocked, were going towards Ugrasena's mansion, evidently to demand strong action against her father.

At Kritavarma's house, she found Subhadra, not a jovial, effusive friend, but a fury, wild with rage, giving vent to anger in the strongest terms at her command. Subhadra said that she would not have seen Satyaa's face again but for her preventing her father from murdering Subhadra's brother.

After Subhadra had grown calmer, Satyaa asked her whether she knew all the lines of the song, *Fare-*

well by a Hero's Wife, which the Kshatriya women sang. She added that she had forgotten some lines, but would like to refresh her memory of the whole song. As Subhadra sang the song, Satyaa memorised it line by line.

Go forth to battle, my lord, if Dharma beckons to you;

I will not try to keep you back.

If I kept you back, your comrades would laugh at you.

And the highborn maidens with flowing skirts would be ashamed even to look at you.

*Let your heart be full of joy, my lord,
As a Kshatriya, you are reared to valour.*

*Your glory is to fight in the vanguard of the battle,
For the honour of your noble forbears,
For Dharma which never dies.*

An occasion may arise when you and your comrades may be few and the enemy numberless;

But remember: the moon is only one, the stars numberless,

Yet it is the moon that destroys darkness.

My lord, you are born to glory; you will certainly return victorious.

Never, never will I see you fleeing from the field of glory.

Perchance our citadel may fall and our people perish;

I may never see you again.

*If God so wills, do not weep for me;
Never will your enemies carry me off in tears and end my days of freedom.*

Remember this: I will never live in the house of another,

Nor work the loom for him, nor carry water-pots from his well.

I will weep, no doubt, but not for myself;

My tears will be an offering for the love you bore me.

When you are no more, I will not let other women bring me sorrow,

Saying that my lord is gone.

I will share your funeral pyre, as I shared your bed.

Hand in hand, we shall go to the God of Death as joyfully as when we took the seven steps¹ around the nuptial fire.

Satyaa was unhappy beyond words when she returned home. All the members of her family were silent, anxious, perturbed. Her father had locked himself into the worship-room.

That night, guards were posted all over the grounds of the mansion. Something was happening—something which would bring down the wrath of the gods.

A little before dawn, Satyaa heard Uri jumping down from her bed, as she used to do whenever she sensed the presence of a rat. But this time she went to the verandah and began to mew in anger. Someone drove her away.

Satyaa had a feeling that something was happening. She left her bed and stealthily went to the verandah and hid herself behind a pillar. In the dim light of the waning moon, she saw two figures, which she immediately recognised as those of her father and her uncle Prāsena. A pony, ready saddled, was standing by. A little further away, another pony stood ready saddled, held by the reins by one of the grooms.

Satyaa could not understand what they were doing at that unearthly hour, and waited patiently to see what

would happen.

After a whispered talk with her father, her uncle Prasena took leave, jumped on the pony and rode away. The groom, with hampers tied to the saddle of the other pony, followed her uncle. Then she saw her father returning to the room where he slept.

She knew that every full-moon day, her father used to go to some place in the forest which surrounded Mount Ujjayanta to offer worship to the God Surya at the very place where the *Syamantaka* had been given to him by the god.

He never started for the forest before dawn and there was no secrecy about his departure. What was happening now was strange and mysterious.

Why was her uncle going to the forest at that time of the night?

She retired to her bed, but could not sleep.

‘LEAVE IT TO ME’

Balarama was mad with anger when he heard that Satrajit had assaulted Krishna.

Large-hearted as he was, he was proud of the spectacular achievements of his younger brother and gloried in that he evoked in people a desire to regard him with worship. He had also a parent's protective attitude towards Krishna.

He went over to his father Vasudeva and told him that he intended to go and chastise Satrajit. Vasudeva advised him to wait till they heard the report from Krishna himself.

Vasudeva sent word to the other Elders—Akrura, Satyaka, and the royal perceptor Gargacharya—to come to King Ugrasena's mansion for an urgent consultation and sent a message to Krishna to join them immediately.

Most of the people of Dwaraka were highly stirred by the report that Satrajit had tried to murder Krishna. It was inconceivable that such a report could be true. They were, therefore, out in the streets converging towards the King's mansion, to learn the truth. When they had gathered in its courtyard, they saw Krishna himself, cheerful, unperturbed and elegantly dressed as ever, coming to Ugrasena's mansion. A cheer went up: ‘Victory to Krishna Vasudeva!’ Many came forward and touched his feet.

Krishna responded by a cheerful smile and friendly salutation.

‘What has happened, lord?’ asked an old Yadava.

‘Nothing to worry about. Go home,’ Krishna assured them.

‘You were assaulted by Satrajit, weren't you?’ asked another.

'Do I look like a man who has been assaulted?' asked Krishna and laughed.

The people joined him in the laughter as he went into the mansion.

King Ugrasena, Vasudeva, his father, Uncle Akrura, Satyaka, Gargacharya and his elder brother were waiting for him. He prostrated himself before them and sat down respectfully.

'Tell us all that happened, Krishna,' said Vasudeva.

'Oh, it was so interesting,' said Krishna with a laugh and continued: 'Satrajit first pointed to his farm, his cows, and also the horses which he was training for an *Aswamedha* that he intended to perform.

'*Aswamedha*!' exclaimed Satyaka and added sarcastically, 'he wants to be a king, does he?'

'Then he asked me why I was anxious to meet him. I told him that I wanted peaceful relations between him and the Yadava chiefs. I also asked him to make good his share of the presents which he had withheld,' said Krishna.

'What did he say?' asked King Ugrasena.

'He was in a bartering mood. He said if Uncle¹ Satyaka accepted his daughter Satyabhama as the wife of Yuyudhana, he would make good his share. He said that you, Uncle, had humiliated him. I explained to him that Satyabhama was not rejected by you because of her social position; she would have been a misfit in a family where a high code of heroic righteousness is maintained and she would be unhappy herself,' said Krishna.

'That was well said, my son,' said King Ugrasena, 'for no better embodiment of *Kshaatra dharma* could be found in Aryavarta than the noble Satyaka.'

Satyaka looked down modestly.

'Then I made a counter-offer,' said Krishna. 'If he handed over *Syamantaka* to Uncle Akrura, to be kept in the royal treasury for the benefit of all the Yadavas, I would see that Satyabhama was married to Satyaki.'

'What did he say to the offer you made?' asked King Ugrasena.

'He said that the God Surya had given him *Syamantaka* for the welfare of his family and he would never part with it. Then I suggested that, bargain or no bargain, in his own interest he should hand over *Syamantaka* to Uncle Akrura. He became very angry; I enjoyed his being so. He was very offensive; I took no notice of it. Ultimately he was so exasperated because I was going to take *Syamantaka* any way that he jumped from his seat, placed his hands on my shoulders and pressed me back on to the bolster—may be, to strangle me. I allowed him to do his worst, resisting my impulse to hit back or protect myself.'

'Why did you submit to such treatment? You could have killed him with a blow,' said King Ugrasena.

'I was only interested in discovering how far his anger would take him,' replied Krishna.

Satyaka looked at Krishna with his bold eyes brimming with admiration and said: 'Govinda, you should not have taken the risk, nor should you have justified my position. He has never forgiven me, first for rejecting his daughter and secondly for getting the Yadavas to make good his share of the presents.'

'You did something more, Uncle Satyaka,' said Krishna. 'You taught him that greatness lies in sacrificing everything for *Dharma*.'

'I had no such intention,' said Satyaka modestly. 'Krishna, I was just following my *Dharma*. We should redeem the pledge you made on our behalf, even at the cost of our lives.'

'Revered Uncle, our word to the Five Brothers would never have been kept but for your magnificent gesture in giving all that you had,' said Krishna with humility.

'But you should not have taken over my quarrel with Satrajit,' said Satyaka.

'It is not your quarrel with Satrajit. It is mine, or rather Satrajit's quarrel with *Dharma*, Uncle Satyaka,' said Krishna.

‘But you put me in a difficult position,’ said Satyaka. ‘If he had parted with *Syamantaka*, I would have had to accept his daughter as Yuyudhana’s wife—a young woman who could never appreciate our family’s high traditions nor carry them on. I do not want my grandchildren forget the *Kshaatra dharma* to which my ancestors were pledged.’

‘You must forgive me for what I did, Uncle,’ said Krishna apologetically, bringing his palms together. ‘But I was sure that he would never part with *Syamantaka*.’

‘Suppose he had parted with it, what then?’ asked Satyaka.

‘Then he would have been re-born. In surrendering all that feeds his selfishness and conceit, he would have purified himself,’ said Krishna. He turned to King Ugrasena with a smile. ‘Then I would have begged of you, lord, to induce Yuyudhana to accept Satrajit’s daughter, for her father would have fully expiated his sins.’

‘What earthly use is there for this discussion?’ Balarama interrupted impatiently. ‘Now that Satrajit has made a murderous assault on you, Govinda, I am going to thrash him.’

‘Brother, please listen to me,’ said Krishna persuasively. ‘The love you bear me naturally makes you impatient to punish Satrajit. But I would beg of you, brother, to restrain your anger for the moment. Let me deal with him.’

‘Govinda,’ said Satyaka, ‘he and his friends must learn the lesson that the Yadavas are not slow to uphold justice.’

‘Uncle Satyaka, you are right,’ said Krishna. ‘With one blow I could have felled him to the ground, possibly killed him. But I wanted to fight not him, but his pride. I would not become a child of wrath because he was one.’ He turned to King Ugrasena and said: ‘You should have seen him, lord, when his daughter intervened. His pride crashed down; his conceit lay in the dust. He felt, for the first time in his life, that

he was powerless. He will never regain his old self-assurance.'

'But you told us just now that you threatened to take *Syamantaka* from him,' said Vasudeva in his slow and measured tones.

'Yes, I did,' replied Krishna.

'How would you be able to do that? He will never part with it,' said Vasudeva. 'And if he keeps *Syamantaka*, now that you have openly declared that you will take it, it will demoralise our people. Our people's spirit is high because of their confidence in your irresistibility.'

Balarama was impatient. 'I don't understand you, Govinda. He tried to murder you; you did not hit him back. You want to take *Syamantaka* from him; you will not do so. This is all nonsense. In a few *ghatikas*, I will finish him and bring *Syamantaka* to the venerable Akrura.'

'Brother, won't you let me deal with Satrajit?' asked Krishna appealingly. 'Satrajit had chosen Uncle Satyaka as his enemy. Now he has transferred his anger to me. Let me try to purge him of his hatred.'

'You are mistaken, Govinda,' said Satyaka. 'Satrajit will never be cured of his vanity and it is impossible for you to get *Syamantaka* without using force.'

'Please, Uncle, I know how much justification you have for being angry with Satrajit,' said Krishna. 'But his power and resources were so great that in our absence you could not so much as refer to his conduct in the Rajya Sabha. I saw how uncomfortable you all felt when I first mentioned the matter the other day. In fact, he has intimidated our people. Whatever their grievances, they have acquiesced to it in silence. That is why at the first opportunity I broke the spell at the Rajya Sabha.'

'This is all the more reason why he should be punished here and now,' interrupted Balarama.

'Forgive me, brother,' said Krishna. 'Satrajit was at war with most of the Yadavas and was determined to destroy Uncle Satyaka. I put the position clearly

before him: either to acknowledge the supremacy of *Kshaatra dharma* and learn to respect Uncle Satyaka or run the risk of being broken.'

'How do you propose to break him?' asked Satyaka. 'He is a very tricky man to deal with.'

'Uncle, why worry, I have taken all your worries on my shoulders.'

'What do you propose to do?' asked Vasudeva.

'I must see what he does now. I beg of you, father, to trust me to get *Syamantaka*.'

'With your way of dealing with him, you will never get it,' said Balarama.

Krishna smiled. 'Brother, have I so far ever given a promise which I have not fulfilled?' he asked and laughed.

Balarama exploded into loud laughter. 'That is the difficulty in dealing with you. I have always quarrelled with you because you make promises and then fulfil them in a way which we do not understand.'

'Not only do you understand what I do, but approve it also. Only you are generous enough to give me the credit by saying that it comes as a surprise to you.'

There was a silence for a few minutes. Then Gargacharya broke it. 'The choice is: if you change the quarrel into a conflict of arms, some kind of civil war must necessarily follow. In spite of all his resources and friends, he would be finished in a day's time. But, if there is a peaceful way of reclaiming him, why not try it? Let us give Krishna a chance.'

'I will not forgive nor forget what he has done and is doing,' said Satyaka. 'It was his duty to share the burden of the presents made to the Five Brothers. I could have forced him to part with his share, but I did not. I wanted the Yadavas to contribute theirs out of their generosity. I had, therefore, to surrender everything myself to set an example to others. Whatever he might say, he felt humiliated at being singled out as betraying the Yadavas. Now he wants to make a bargain: to force me to accept his daughter to make good

his share. I will not be a party to a bargain like that. If I can help it, no Yadava will submit to this blackmail to regain what they gave so handsomely. As regards his daughter, she would never marry my son. That is final. If she came, she would have no respect for us, nor we for her. The eternal ordinances of the family would have been defied. But as Balarama rightly says, what it is necessary to decide is: what are we going to do about his having assaulted Krishna? Krishna is more valuable to us than all our possessions, even our life. He has been the redeemer of the Yadavas. Anyone who assaults him must die. That is my final opinion.'

Balarama interrupted: 'Exactly. I entirely agree with you. I will not allow anyone to lay his hands on Govinda without paying the penalty.'

'I have made up my mind,' said Satyaka. 'The moment I heard that Satrajit had laid his murderous hands on Govinda, I pledged myself not to let him live. Whether I accept Krishna's advice and wait, or follow Balarama's proposal and act now, is immaterial.'

'It is very kind of you, Uncle Satyaka,' replied Krishna. 'I know how you love me and feel insulted at Satrajit laying his hands on me. But let me try to extract the venom from him. If I fail, you can take any action that you like.'

'What do you want us to do now?' asked King Ugrasena.

'Whatever you feel about Satrajit, for the moment please leave the matter to me,' said Krishna with folded hands. 'If I fail, I will even agree to Big Brother smashing his skull with his bare fist,' he added with a bovisish laugh.

'Why not let me do it now?' asked Balarama.

'Please, please, I beg of you,' said Krishna. 'Don't misunderstand me. Let me try to kill Satrajit's conceit first and bring *Syamantaka* to the venerable Uncle Akrura.'

'You will never be able to do that,' said Balarama.

Gargacharya intervened: 'We must leave the

matter to Govinda, for I see that Satrajit's assault on him has changed the complexion of the quarrel. Govinda has purposely invited it and we ought to let him deal with Satrajit. I have confidence in him. Whatever he does, he will secure the triumph of *Dharma*.'

King Ugrasena said: 'Krishna, we have complete confidence in you. We shall not take any action till you ask us to. You are free to do what you think best.'

SYAMANTAKA IS STOLEN

A piercing scream rent the silence of the early dawn, followed by shouts: 'Thief, thief! *Syamantaka* is stolen!'

Everyone in Satrajit's mansion awoke with a start and, recognising the voice of the master, ran to the spot from which the shouts came.

Satyaa was not asleep at the time. She was just pondering over the strange sight which she had seen a few *ghatikas* before, of her father sending away her uncle Prasena on some mission. She immediately sprang from her bed and rushed to the verandah and followed her father, who was running towards the gate into the temple grounds, evidently chasing the thief.

Bhangakara, Vatapati and Tapasvanta, her brothers, and some of the guards gathered on the verandah first, and then followed them. The other members of the family also gathered on the verandah and were aghast that *Syamantaka* was stolen. The calamity expected by every one had descended on them: Krishna had stolen *Syamantaka*.

Satyaa, who was only a few paces behind her father, saw him bend down near the gate, drop something and pick up a *kundala* (earring) from the ground.

Her father shouted: 'Here is the thief's *kundala*. Whose is this?' he asked, holding up the *kundala*. Satyaa was taken aback. Was it a dream that her father himself dropped the earring first, and then lifted it up for others to see?—or, was it really so? She battled within herself as to whether what she had seen was correct.

When the others joined them, her father raved as

if he was possessed of a demon: 'That thief, Krishna, has stolen *Syamantaka*.' He abused Krishna, invoked curses on him and threatened him with dire punishment. He looked fierce, his hair was ruffled, his un-combed beard fluttered in the morning breeze around his flushed face. '*Syamantaka* has gone. Krishna has stolen it,' he shouted.

'But, father, you were sleeping in front of the worship-room,' said Satyaa.

'I had just gone out for a few moments. When I returned, the door of the worship-room was broken open and *Syamantaka* had disappeared.' Then, with hands upraised, he loudly invoked the God: 'Oh, God of Light, let your rays scorch the thief. Let him and his family be burnt in the fires of hell.'

Bhangakara brought his father back to the mansion and asked: 'Father, did you see the thief yourself?'

'When I came back to the room, it was twilight. I saw the shadow of someone running away. I thought it was some servant. When I discovered the theft, a scream escaped me. Then I came out on to the verandah and saw the thief running towards the gate into the temple grounds. I could not see his face, but he must have been Krishna. I have no doubt that this is his *kundala*.'

After a pause, he shouted: 'I will destroy every Yadava if they do not restore *Syamantaka* to me.'

Then he suddenly turned to Bhangakara: 'Why are you looking at me so sheepishly? Get my chariot, the big one, ready. Blow the conch. Send word to Shatadhanva to come in his chariot; prepare yours too. Call our *maharathis* together immediately.'

He turned towards the guards and shouted again: 'You are all idiots. I will cut off your heads if my *Syamantaka* is not found. Get my chariot ready. I will pursue the thief to the end of the three worlds.'

Bhangakara quieted his father a little and induced him to go to take his bath and perform his morning rituals before going out.

The wildness with which Satrajit shouted affected the other members of the family and the servants also. They moved about the mansion and the grounds like demented people, trying to trace the culprit, find something belonging to him, or discover his footsteps.

'Bring my war chariot and four horses,' shouted Satrajit again, when he had finished his morning rituals.

Only Satyaa was confused. Doubts arose in her mind: 'Why did Father, a few *ghatikas* before dawn, send Uncle Prasena somewhere and that so stealthily? For what purpose? Is it possible that Krishna, the hero and protector of *Dharma*, could steal *Syamantaka* like a common thief? Is the earring Krishna's? Is my impression that my father dropped the earring before picking it up, correct?—or was it a dream?'

She loved her father and found it difficult to believe that he would charge Krishna with theft without good reason. At the same time she knew how clever her father was and could not reconcile the story her father had told them with Krishna's character. Again and again she was oppressed with the same doubt: Krishna, the hero, the arbiter of empires, the redeemer of *Dharma*, who only a day before had exercised supreme self-control in not hitting back at her father, which he could have easily done—was he capable of committing such a theft?

She could not share her doubts with anyone in the house. Everyone had come to believe that Krishna had stolen *Syamantaka* and that, while running away, he had dropped his earring.

Satrajit's chariot was ready. The *atirathis*—Bhangakara and Shatadhanva—were there in their chariots; so were the *maharathis* to whom the call had been sent, all armed with swords, bows and arrows.

Satrajit repeated to them how Krishna had stolen *Syamantaka*.

As Satrajit was going to his chariot, Bhangakara prostrated himself before his father, and then stood up, his hands joined. 'Father, is it necessary to go to the King in war chariots and bearing bows and

arrows?' he asked in an appealing voice.

Satrajit glared at his son. 'It is a sacrilege. *Syamantaka* was given to me by the God Surya. I will destroy Krishna with my own hands if he does not restore it to me,' he said decisively.

'Father, do consider, I beg of you. It may lead to a serious conflict. Krishna is very powerful,' said Bhangakara.

'You coward!' said Satrajit, breathing deeply. 'If necessary, I will kill everyone who stands in my way. I will rage through Dwaraka.' Then he added contemptuously: 'I never thought that my son would have the heart of a woman. Get on your chariot and follow me.'

Satrajit rode in his chariot, the others followed in their own. Many guards kept them company on foot. On the way they continued to announce that a calamity had befallen the Yadavas: *Syamantaka* had been stolen by Krishna.

The procession of war chariots clattered on through the town to halt in the square in front of the royal mansion where a crowd was already gathering.

When Satrajit reached the royal mansion, King Ugrasena was resting. His health had become very weak and every morning, after the rituals, he took to his bed before his meal-time when there was no Rajya Sabha.

At Satrajit's insistence, Brihadbala, Uddhava's brother and the maternal grandson of King Ugrasena, who lived with him, went to announce his arrival. The King invited Satrajit and the *atirathis* to his bedroom; he did not feel like going to the audience chamber.

Satrajit, accompanied by Bhangakara and Shata-dhanva, came to visit the King in his bedroom. They were armed not only with swords, but with bows and arrows; it was the height of discourtesy. Custom enjoined that no person should come into the presence of the King carrying arms other than a sword.

Satrajit had not yet fully recovered his self-possession, and, without offering any salutation, shouted:

'My *Syamantaka* has been stolen by Krishna, the thief. I have come just to inform you that if Krishna does not return it immediately, I shall kill him. I shall kill everyone who stands in my way.'

'Noble Satrajit, take your seat,' said the King though he was surprised at the discourtesy shown to him. 'You also,' he told the *atirathis*, Bhangakara and Shata-dhanva. 'Calm yourself and tell me what the matter is. I have not been able to follow you.'

With great difficulty, Satrajit was induced to take a seat. Though he did so, his hands were trembling with excitement and his eyes were rolling.

'Compose yourself, Satrajit, and tell me what the matter is,' said the King.

Satrajit paused for a few moments after telling his story and then continued: 'Krishna has stolen my *Syamantaka*. He told me that he would take it away from me after sunset yesterday.' Then he paused again. 'I want you to order him to return it to me. If not, I and my friends will fight to the bitter end, even if there is going to be a war.'

By the time Satrajit had completed his narrative, Brihadbala, who had been sent to bring the other Elders and Krishna immediately, returned with Vasudeva and Satyaka, followed by Yuyudhana Satyaki. At the King's invitation Satyaka and Vasudeva sat near him on the bed.

'Satrajit says that his *Syamantaka* was stolen this morning from his worship-room,' said King Ugrasena to the other Elders. He asked Satrajit to narrate his story to them and asked Brihadbala to call Krishna.

After Satrajit had repeated his version of the theft, Satyaka, in a severe tone, said: 'Son of Nighna, I don't believe a word of what you say. Krishna would never, never stoop to stealing your *Syamantaka*. Yesterday we wanted to take it from you, but he stopped us from doing so.'

'Then I am a liar!' Satrajit exclaimed indignantly. 'Is that what you want to say? You charge me with telling a lie? Son of Vrishni, you have been conspiring

against me from the very beginning. You have always tried to humiliate me. My patience has now come to an end.'

Satyaka's eyes were fixed steadily on Satrajit. 'Satrajit, I don't care what you think of me or what you propose to do,' he said. 'But I have known Krishna since he came to Mathura as a boy. He is the very embodiment of *Dharma*. I cannot believe that he could have stolen your *Syamantaka*.'

'If that is the view of the Elders, I will seek justice in my own way. I am going now to Krishna's mansion, and, if necessary, will burn it over his head,' shouted Satrajit, rising from his seat.

By this time, a large crowd was gathering in the courtyard of the King's mansion, attracted by the rumour that *Syamantaka* had been stolen by Krishna and by the spectacular arrival at the royal mansion of Satrajit and his friends in war chariots.

When Krishna came into the courtyard, some of Satrajit's partisans shouted: 'Thief, thief.' Some people, angry at Krishna being abused, shouted back. A scuffle followed.

As more and more Yadavas came into the courtyard, voices were raised and challenges were flung at one another.

Krishna walked into the King's bedroom and was surprised to see him seated on his bed, with his father Vasudeva and Satyaka by his side. Satrajit stood in front, with Bhangakara and Shatadhanva by his side.

As soon as he entered the room Satrajit shouted: 'Here comes the thief.'

'Thief! What have I stolen?' asked Krishna amused.

'You stole my *Syamantaka* this morning from my worship-room,' shouted Satrajit.

'This morning I stole *Syamantaka*!' exclaimed Krishna in surprise.

'Yes, this morning. When I left my room for a few moments, you broke open the doors of the worship-room and took away *Syamantaka*. As I returned, I

saw you running away,' said Satrajit.

'Do you want me to believe that, like a common thief, I broke open your worship-room and stole *Syamantaka*?' asked Krishna, unperturbed and laughing. Did you see me running? Why didn't you catch me?

'You were a hundred paces in advance, so I could not catch you,' replied Satrajit.

'Did you recognise me?' asked Krishna.

Satrajit nodded assent.

'If I was running away, you could not have seen my face,' said Krishna.

'Who else would steal *Syamantaka*?' retorted Satrajit. 'You threatened to take it from me after sunset yesterday and you carried out the theft.' Then, with upturned eyes, he invoked the aid of his guardian deity: 'I call upon the God Surya to bear witness that you and you alone stole *Syamantaka*.'

Satyaka intervened, his piercing eyes fixed on Satrajit: 'What Krishna says is right. You did not see his face, son of Nighna. There is nothing to show that Krishna stole *Syamantaka*.'

'It was Krishna. And if you doubt it, here is his earring which he dropped when he was running away. I found it near the gate.' Satrajit produced the earring. 'Is it yours or not? Tell me.'

Krishna glanced at the earring and said: 'Yes, it is mine. It dropped from my ear when I was at your house yesterday—possibly when you were trying to push me back on the bolster to strangle me.'

'A lie, a lie!' shouted Satrajit.

There was an uproar in the courtyard of the royal mansion and the square beyond. A clash of arms was also heard.

KRISHNA'S VOW OF SELF-IMMOLATION

Soon Brihadbala returned with Akrura, Balarama, Uddhava and Satyaki.

The King and the Elders—Vasudeva, Satyaka and Akrura—retired to another room to discuss the matter among themselves.

After they had returned to the bedroom, all came out on to the verandah, the King's hand placed on Krishna's shoulder instead of Brihadbala's, as was his invariable practice.

Satrajit, accompanied by Bhangakara and Shata-dhanva, followed them on to the verandah.

The groups of people, collected in the courtyard and the square, were shouting at one another. Some groups had already started abusing and threatening. There were stray clashes of arms.

As soon as the King and the Elders came out on to the verandah, the people gathered in the courtyard and the square lapsed into silence. However, there was a commotion in the crowd. A way was being made for the *atirathis* who had arrived on the scene; they had rushed there on learning that Satrajit had charged Krishna with having stolen *Syamantaka* and that the sacredness of the royal presence had been violated by Satrajit, Bhangakara and Shatadhanva visiting the King in his mansion armed with bows and arrows. They stepped up to the verandah and stood behind the Elders, their bows ready to shoot.

When the commotion ceased, the King removed his hand from Krishna's shoulder and Krishna stepped back into his appropriate place among the *atirathis*, with Balarama by his side. Suddenly a young *maharathi* from among Satrajit's partisans stepped out of the

crowd and, pointing at Krishna, shouted: 'There is the thief. He stole *Syamantaka*.' Then he spat at Krishna.

Balarama needed no provocation to vent his anger. He stepped down from the verandah, his huge bulk overshadowing the *maharathi*, lifted him as if he was a little child and flung him over the heads of the persons collected there, to be caught by the upraised arms of men standing where his aerial journey ended.

The crowd burst into uproarious laughter and shouted 'Jaya Baladeva—Victory to Baladeva,' drowning the shouts of Satrajit's partisans of 'Thief, thief.'

Satyaka came a step forward. The tall, wiry old warrior, straight as an arrow, was the very embodiment of authority. His commanding gesture restored silence in the crowd. The laughter ceased.

'Listen, I am conveying to you the commands of the venerable King Ugrasena,' said Satyaka. 'The son of Nighna (Satrajit) has charged the noble Govinda with having stolen *Syamantaka*.' Satyaka's way of speaking was crisp and direct, and he uttered the words 'son of Nighna' contemptuously.

Satyaka continued: 'He says that Krishna, a little before dawn, broke open his worship-room and took away *Syamantaka*. Govinda denies it. It is a serious matter; it affects us all, for we owe him our survival, our martial strength and our prestige among the Princes of Aryavarta.'

Satyaka paused, surveyed the crowd as if to gauge the effect of his words and added: 'The venerable King has asked the son of Nighna to establish to the satisfaction of the Elders that it was Krishna who stole *Syamantaka*. The Elders will hear Satrajit first. Then they will hear what Govinda has to say. Finally, they will decide whether what the son of Nighna says is true and impose the appropriate penalty on the thief or the perjurer.'

Satrajit stepped forward and interrupted Satyaka. 'What more do you want? He threatened to take *Syamantaka* from me somehow. This is his earring. Let him deny it. It was found on the ground near the

gate through which he ran away.'

Satyaka turned to Satrajit. His voice was stern. 'Yes, we know that. Govinda did not say that he would take the jewel by theft. But this I will make clear to you all,' he said and raised his right hand and, with a commanding gesture, added: 'I have known Govinda since his boyhood. He is our saviour. He has led us to this land of plenty. He would never stoop to theft. But the son of Nighna says that he has stolen *Syamantaka* and he will have to show us clearly that the faith of our lives is not well founded.'

There were loud cries of '*sadhu, sadhu.*' At the same time, some of Satrajit's partisans shouted: 'He is a thief, he is a thief.'

Satyaka stood still for a moment, his proud head flung back, his right hand raised to command silence. The crowd lapsed into silence again.

Before Satyaka could resume, Krishna stepped forward and said with clarity and emphasis: 'What the noble Satrajit says is a lie. I did not steal *Syamantaka*, but I have decided to take it from him and give it to the venerable Akrura for the benefit of all the Yadavas. I made it clear to him and I will do it, whatever happens....' Satrajit was going to interrupt Krishna, when, by a wave of his hand, he indicated that he had not finished.

Then Krishna resumed: 'The greatest service which I could render not only to the Yadavas but to the noble Satrajit himself, is to deprive him of the jewel which makes him arrogant and selfish. And I am going to keep my word. As you know, I have always done my best to keep my pledged word.'

There was some uproar among the partisans of Satrajit.

'Listen,' said Krishna in a tone of great solemnity, as if he was pronouncing a death sentence. 'If I fail to do so, I shall invite the venerable King to cut me off from the Yadava community. Invite my venerable Father disown me as his son. Invite the venerable Gargacharya to lay his curse on me. Invite the vener-

able Satyaka to declare that I have betrayed *Kshaatra dharma* and am unfit to be an *atirathi*. Invite my beloved Brother to smash my skull with his bare fist if he likes.' He paused for a moment and, in a moving tone, added: 'You all love me only because I live in *Dharma*. Day and night I have worked for its redemption. If I fail it, I will have no right to live.'

There was a hush among the spectators. The Elders, except Satyaka, wiped the tears from their eyes. Most of the people in the crowd also heard with awe the beloved voice, which they had listened to with affection and respect in victory as in distress all those years, passing the most terrible sentence on himself.

Then, with flashing eyes, Krishna turned to Satrajit. 'And you, Satrajit, son of Nighna, you have filched their possessions from the Yadavas. You have been trying to overawe them by your wealth and arrogance. You want to blackmail Uncle Satyaka into accepting your daughter as a wife for Yuyudhana. Now you want to steal from me the sole purpose for which I live.'

His eyes, flaming with brilliance, were now fixed on Satrajit, who winced before his imperious glance.

Krishna continued: 'If you are found guilty, I shall not trouble the venerable King about what to do with you. I will see to it that, if an iota of *Kshaatra dharma* is left in you, you will invite the death sentence upon yourself.'

Then Krishna turned to the crowd. 'Venerable King, Elders, and you Yadavas, I have only one thing to beg of you,' he said in a humble tone like someone seeking a favour. 'Be a little patient. Give me time to vindicate the honour of all of you, for it is not my honour that is at stake, but the honour of all of you.'

Shouts of 'Jaya Krishna, Jaya Govinda' rent the sky.

SATYAA DISAPPEARS

When her father and the others left for the royal mansion, Satyaa felt that her dreamworld had crashed over her head. There was no more hope; not even a distant possibility of her marrying Krishna.

Her father had declared war on Krishna. Now, she was sure, he would not stop at anything. A clash of arms between her father's partisans and the Yadavas who followed the Elders and looked upon Krishna as their saviour, was inevitable; perhaps a civil war might follow. She had a shrewd suspicion that her father had been preparing for some such event for two years.

What made her most miserable was that Krishna—'her lord' as she used to call him in her daydreams—would be branded as a thief and his fair name tarnished; perhaps he would be disowned by the Yadavas.

It would be a terrible thing if Krishna was to be the victim of such a baseless calumny. She thought and thought again and again, but it was difficult for her to believe her father's story. With her own eyes she had seen the stealthy departure of her uncle Prasena on some strange mission during the night; also her father dropping the earring near the gate—she was now sure that he actually dropped it—and then picking it up to show it to her brothers and others as proof of Krishna's guilt. All these happenings, she felt certain, had something to do with the disappearance of *Syamantaka*.

She was in great distress; her father was out to destroy 'her lord'; the only person who could help him to establish his innocence was herself, and she was unable to vindicate his honour.

A little before the meal-time, her father and bro-

ther Bhangakara returned home. She heard with dismay what her father, with a triumphant air, told her stepmothers; how he had spoken his mind to the Elders; how the people had called Krishna a thief; how Krishna was forced to take a vow of immolating himself if *Syamantaka* was not traced.

Satyaa was horrified at the prospect of Krishna immolating himself if he could not find *Syamantaka*. At the meal-time, she could not swallow a morsel; later she could not get a wink of sleep when she retired for her siesta. When she heard Uri's mewing, complaining that she had not been stroked since the morning, he angrily pushed her out of her bed.

Uri knew her mistress's moods and felt that she was in great distress. The cat stood up on her hind legs, placed her front paws on the bedstead near Satyaa's face and began purring in sympathy, sometimes putting out her little tongue. Satyaa, her face suffused with tears, saw the cat's attempt to share her distress. She lifted her on to the bed and embraced her. 'Uri, you are the only one I have; otherwise the world is empty,' she whispered to the cat.

She sent her foster-mother, Mugi, a Naga woman who had nursed her after her mother's death, to Subhadra, requesting her to meet her at the temple as usual. He also sent word to Kritavarma to take a message to Satyaki to meet her at his house at sunset.

Satyaa suffered inexpressible anguish at the various reports of the happenings of the morning. They varied in detail and were highly exaggerated.

The report came from the city through servants, friends, relatives and spies returning from the town. There was considerable excitement in Dwaraka; also a few clashes between armed groups.

Many Yadavs were angry at her father charging Krishna with theft; they did not believe that he could have stolen *Syamantaka*.

Everyone appeared to be distressed at the vow of self-immolation taken by Krishna.

The *atirathis* who had followed Krishna to Hasti-

napura, had a stormy meeting. They thought that her father was conspiring to acquire the kingship of the Yadavas.

She asked Bhangakara to give his version of the incident. Though more or less the same as her father's it differed entirely in its total effect.

According to Bhangakara, the Elders would not believe their father's charge against Krishna. The King had shown special affection for Krishna; he had departed from his usual practice of taking support by placing a hand on Brihadbala's shoulder and had gone on to the verandah with his hand on Krishna's shoulder; it was an intentional act to show that he did not believe the charge levelled against Krishna by their father.

Satyaka, as was his habit, had spoken bluntly, said Bhangakara. He conveyed to the people that their father's charge against Krishna was a false one.

Bhangakara also told her how awesome an impression was made on the people by Krishna's vow of self-immolation.

The ghastly picture of Krishna immolating himself rose before her mind's eye. . . . The beautiful eyes which flashed love and understanding were close for ever The face that always wore a smile at which every heart throbbed with joy was frozen into mask-like immobility. . . . The figure, so elegant, so youthful, and yet so strong, was pale and inert as the flaming tongues of the funeral pyre licked it!

Everybody in Dwaraka, men, women and children, in particular Mother Devaki, Rukmini, Shaibya, Subhadra, would be shuddering at the prospect of Krishna immolating himself if *Syamantaka* was not found. Her father was no fool and must have taken good care to see that it could not be found. She felt sure that he had sent it away with Uncle Prasena to the forest where her father used to go every month to worship the God Surya and, by His grace, bring back gold. And she was so unfortunate that she could not even lift her little finger to save Krishna, whom she had in her dreams and waking hours called 'my lord'.

Mugi, her foster-mother, returned with a heart-breaking message from Subhadra. The old Naga woman reproduced the exact words of Krishna's sister: 'I don't want to look at the face of the daughter of the blackguard who has charged Govinda with theft.' Satyaa was cut to the quick.

As the sun was about to set, she went to Kritavarma's house for a talk with Satyaki. Her home, she felt, was a hell. She hated her father; he was a liar. She hated her stepmother, sisters and brothers for believing the lie. She could sense that Bhangakara was not prepared to accept their father's version, but was a loyal son and would not utter a word in defence of Krishna. She could have saved her beloved Krishna, but she was a coward.

When she returned home after having talked to Satyaki, she decided that before she took the final step, she would send a farewell to 'her lord.'

Between her sobs, she continued to chant some of the lines of the song, *Farewell by a Hero's Wife*.

As she went on singing the song again, out of the depth of her misery, new lines came to the surface about what a hero's wife would say if bidding farewell under the circumstances in which Krishna was placed. The lines took shape and echoed and re-echoed in her mind.

Before retiring, she called her foster-mother. Mugi, and said: 'Mugi go back to Subhadra immediately. Give her my message word for word. Don't change one word or forget any.'

'I will do it, replied Mugi. She was crying herself seeing the distress of her mistress.

'Mugi, tell Subhadra: "You are right. I am not worthy to be received by you. However, for the sake of the love we used to bear each other, I beg you to convey these missing lines from the *Farewell by a Hero's Wife* to your brother:

*If perchance, word, flame-tipped shafts from
venomous tongues*

*Are aimed at your fair name, so dear to me, so
precious to you, more valued than life,
I will stand before you, bare-breasted, welcoming
them,
And like a burning pillar, reduce myself to ashes
at your feet.*

*Then, lord, press my ashes against your arms,
which have so often held me in love,
They will cling to you, as I had hoped to do, had
not cruel fate intervened".*

Having sent the message, she joined the womenfolk of the mansion at the meal-time. After she had taken the little she could, she retired to bed, but not to sleep.

When midnight was announced by dums and fifes and everyone in the mansion was fast asleep, she rose from her bed, changed into the clothes of a maid-servant, collected Uri in her arms, put her hand on her mouth to prevent her from mewling, and went forth into the darkness.

THE MISSING LINES OF THE SONG

When Krishna, after paying his respects to his mother, returned to his mansion, Rukmini and Shaibya, with their children, received him in a silence more eloquent than speech, that bore witness to the terrible situation which had resulted from the incident in the morning. Their relations had reached a stage of profound understanding which needed no words to express their feelings to one another.

Krishna bore no traces of the terrible ordeal which was facing him. He had an understanding smile for both his wives. He chatted with the children.

After the meal, the leading Yadavas called on Krishna, anxious to share his distress, but only to find that they themselves were in distress while he was the comforter.

'I am sure Satrajit is heading towards a fall,' said Krishna to the visitors. 'However, we all have to see that the Yadavas don't grow wild.' He advised them to remain calm whatever happened. He continued: 'If I am innocent—as I know I am and as you all believe—the Great God will protect us all.'

'Why should you have taken such a pledge?' asked Kritavarma.

'I had to, if I am to fulfil my mission in life,' replied Krishna with humility.

Most of the leaders, however, were not satisfied with this explanation.

The visitors left one by one; Uddhava and his two wives, Kapila and Pingala, stayed behind. These two Naga princesses, always dressed in clothes of the same colour and wearing the same flowers, were in evident distress. Their moon-like faces, which always had a

gay smile, were clouded, their bright little eyes full of tears.

'I am certain that *Syamantaka* has been concealed by Satrajit somewhere,' said Uddhava. 'We have to find out where and with whom it is.'

Krishna said with a smile: 'Don't worry, Uddhava. The Great God will take care of us and find *Syamantaka*. It is also a test for the Yadavas whether they have the courage to stand up to blackmail.'

'One thing was strange,' continued Krishna. 'Prasena, Satrajit's brother, an irrepressible bully, was not with him in the morning. He is a great quarrel-monger and should have been there. Let us find out what has happened to him.'

'I have already tried to do so,' replied Uddhava. 'He was there in the mansion till yesterday night; he disappeared before morning.'

Later, Subhadra came up breathlessly and clung to Krishna, putting her hand on his shoulder.

'Brother Govinda, what have you done? Taken a vow to immolate yourself?' she queried.

As he found she was sobbing, he took her face in both his hands and lifted it. 'What is the matter with you?' he asked her, as he wiped away her tears with his scarf.

'Suppose you fail to find what has happened to *Syamantaka*?' she asked in a choking voice.

'Why, then I will fulfil my vow,' replied Krishna. 'Be brave. Such an occasion will never arise. And if it does, it is not worth living as a thief,' he added and patted her head and again wiped her tears away with his scarf.

Subhadra, now somewhat composed, said: 'The dirty "big cat" wanted to see me. You know that we go to the temple together every afternoon?'

'You mean Satrajit's daughter?' asked Krishna and smiled indulgently at his sister.

'Who else could I mean? She is the big cat.' She had the habit of nicknaming every one.

'If she is the big cat, who is the small one?' asked Krishna with a smile.

'Uri, who is always with her. She wanted to meet me,' said Subhadra. 'I replied that I would never see her face again.'

'Why? What is wrong with her face, Subhadra?' said Krishna in jest. 'You always liked it.'

'But do you know what she did?' asked Subhadra.

'How could I know?' asked Krishna.

The ladies left for the women's apartment, leaving Krishna and Uddhava to discuss the matter between themselves.

After the family had had its meal and was on the point of retiring to bed, Subhadra returned in great excitement. 'Brother, here is "the big cat" once again.'

'Here!' exclaimed Krishna in surprise.

'No. Not herself. She has sent a message asking me to convey to you a few lines of a song,' said Subhadra.

'What song?' asked Krishna.

'The Farewell by a Hero's Wife.'

'I know it by heart,' said Krishna. 'I would be a fool if I couldn't remember what you women-folk sing almost every day.'

'The "big cat" has had the temerity to send word that you don't know the whole song. She has asked me to convey to you the missing lines.'

'What are the missing lines?' asked Krishna.

*'If perchance, lord, flame-tipped shafts from venomous
tongues*

*Are aimed at your fair name, so dear to me, so precious
to you, more valued than life,
I will stand before you, bare-breasted, welcoming them,
And like a burning pillar, reduce myself to ashes at
your feet.*

*Then, lord, press my ashes against your arms, which
have so often held me in love,
They will cling to you, as I had hoped to do, had not
cruel fate intervened.'*

‘What do you think the lines mean?’ asked Krishna.

Rukmini, who was present, said: ‘She is teaching Shaibya and me a lesson, the impudent girl!’

Krishna replied: ‘I don’t think your explanation is correct. Anyway, let us forget all about it and go to sleep.’

The next morning Krishna got up at the *Brahma muhurta*, the hour of sanctity before dawn. As usual, he went to the sea for a bathe and offered worship to the Sun God.

After his morning *sandhya*, as usual, he wrestled with Uddhava to keep his body in fighting trim. Usually, Satyaki joined them, but today he was absent.

After the bout, Krishna sent Uddhava to enquire why Satyaki had not come to the wrestling pit. They all thought that he was possibly unwell.

After having another dip in the sea, Krishna reached home to find Kapila and Pingala, the twin Naga princesses, the wives of Uddhava, waiting for him. Anxiety was writ large on their faces and their eyes were wet with tears. An elderly Naga woman, evidently in distress, was standing behind them.

‘Lord, Satrajit’s daughter is missing,’ one of the twins said.

‘Who? Satyabhama?’ asked Krishna. The twins nodded assent.

‘How did you come to know that?’ asked Krishna.

‘This is Mugi, Satyaa’s foster-mother, a Naga woman who comes to us often. She has been crying since morning when she discovered that her mistress had disappeared,’ said one of the twins.

Krishna was puzzled. Did the lines of the song carry any message, he asked himself. Then he turned to Mugi and asked her how she came to know that her mistress had disappeared.

‘She was crying the whole day, lord,’ said Mugi in a halting manner and broke down, covering her face with her hands.

‘When did she send you to Subhadra with the missing lines of the song?’ asked Krishna.

‘It was late in the evening after she returned from the house of the noble Kritavarma that she sent me to your sister, lord, with the missing lines,’ replied Mugi and added after a pause: ‘When I returned to the mansion, she asked me to retire, saying that she was going to bed.’

‘When did you find out that she had gone?’ asked Krishna.

‘Early in the morning, lord,’ replied Mugi. ‘When I came to help her dress in the morning as usual, she was gone.’

‘What about Uri?’ asked Krishna.

‘Uri has gone too!’ Mugi broke down. ‘And Satyaa left behind all her clothes and ornaments. Evidently she dressed herself in a maid-servant’s garb when she left.’

As Mugi was talking, heavy foot-steps were heard; the women shrank back in respect. In came Satyaka, without his diadem, his arms and his scarf, his face clouded with anger, eyes aglow with fire. Everyone in the house felt that something extraordinary must have happened to make Satyaka come here unannounced, instead of calling Krishna to his mansion.

Without further introduction, Satyaka demanded: ‘Govinda, where is Yuyudhana?’

‘What is the matter, Uncle?’ asked Krishna. ‘He is not with us, nor did he come to the wrestling pit.’

‘The matter? *Satyaki has disappeared,*’ said Satyaka.

The women present were aghast.

‘I myself was surprised when he did not come to the wrestling pit this morning. I have already sent Uddhava to find out what is wrong with him,’ said Krishna.

‘When did you see him last?’ asked Satyaka.

‘He met me last in the evening before he went to Kritavarma’s house,’ replied Krishna.

‘He is not there. I made enquiries,’ said Satyaka, his brow furrowed.

The old foster-mother, Mugi, screamed and ex-

claimed 'O, Lord Pashupati!' and fell down in a faint.

Rukmini ran to her aid. Shaibya went to get water. The twin princesses fanned her with the end of their scarves.

'Who is this woman?' demanded Satyaka, pointing to Mugi.

'She is the foster-mother of Satyabhama, Satrajit's daughter,' replied Krishna.

'Why is she here?' asked Satyaka.

'Satrajit's daughter has also disappeared, Uncle,' said Krishna.

The old woman, now a little revived, began to cry and, placing her hands on her forehead, began to shake her head. 'I now understand, I now understand,' she repeated. 'They have both gone away together.'

A shadow of fierce anger was on Satyaka's face. 'Who?' he peremptorily demanded.

'Noble Satyaki, your son, lord, and my mistress,' replied Mugi and began to beat her head.

'My son go away with Satrajit's daughter!' exclaimed Satyaka, who, like Indra, the god of rain and storm, had thunder in his voice and lightning in his eyes. Everyone present held his or her breath.

'Yes, yes,' said Mugi. 'I know they used to meet each other at the house of the noble Kritavarma.'

'I won't believe it,' said Satyaka. 'My son, Yuyudhana, would never marry Satrajit's daughter.'

'I cannot believe it either,' said Krishna. 'All that I know is that he admired her after she had kidnapped him and helped him to come with me to Hastinapura.'

'Of all the women in the world, my son could not find anyone better than the daughter of that wretch?' said Satyaka, shaking his head, unable to reconcile himself to what Mugi had said.

'Uncle, please, don't be hasty. Appearances are often deceptive,' said Krishna, trying to mollify Satyaka.

'I hope he dies before he marries that wretch's daughter,' stated Satyaka and left for his home.

The twin princesses also left with Mugi.

‘What is the meaning of this double disappearance?’ Rukmini, the Princess of Vidarbha, asked.

For a moment, Krishna was in deep thought. ‘The noble Satyaka cannot be right. Yuyudhana is incapable of being dishonest. If he wanted to marry Satrajit’s daughter, he would certainly have told me about it.’

Then he looked at the distant sea for a moment and smiled. Suddenly he turned to Rukmini and said, his eyes no longer clouded: ‘Vaidarbhi, I now know what the missing lines of the song signify.’

‘What is their meaning, lord?’ asked Rukmini.

‘Don’t ask me now, Vaidarbhi. I will tell you in good time,’ replied Krishna.

‘They are fools, both of them,’ he muttered to himself.

KRISHNA DISAPPEARS

Satrajit felt humiliated, his self-confidence shattered. His well-laid plans had failed; there was no doubt about it. Satyaa, that accursed daughter of his, had made him the laughing-stock of Dwaraka. On the other hand, the vow that Krishna had taken before the assembled Yadavas had increased his prestige.

As if this was not enough, his brother Prasena had not returned. He should have been back, his mission successfully completed. Had something untoward happened to him? Was *Syamantaka* safe?

He sat performing his morning ritual, but he rushed to the verandah every time he heard a footstep, to welcome his brother; and every time he was disappointed.

He could see that life had gone out of the sacrificial session too. The officiating priests had come, no doubt, but they performed the ritual without any zest.

The members of his family moved about timidly as if the shadow of an imminent disaster was over them.

Yesterday, his dependants had looked upon him as the awesome master who was out to destroy Krishna; today, he saw compassion lurking in their eyes, or much worse, amusement at the ridiculous situation in which he was placed.

The rumours which had been spread in the town were very disquieting. Most people believed, as he himself did, that Satyaki had eloped with Satyaa to marry her according to the Gandharva form of marriage.

The hearts of most of the Yadavas went out to Satyaka; his son had betrayed the great tradition of

the brave chief, of whom they were proud.

The *Syamantaka* episode, as he found, had receded into the background of people's minds. Most people would not believe that Krishna could have stolen the jewel. The popular view was that Satyabhama had stolen the jewel and taken it with her when she ran away with Satyaki. He knew that the belief was wrong; at the same time he was filled with superstitious awe. All his prosperity and power, he was convinced, had come to him because of the magic jewel; now that he had parted from it, calamity might overtake him.

The Yadavas were intrigued at Satyaki's strange conduct. He had run away with Satyabhama, but had left all his arms and his chariot behind him. If he was eloping with Satyaa, naturally he would have expected her father to pursue him and to have to fight the pursuer. Why then had he not taken his arms and chariot with him? And where could they have gone?

Rukmini, the Princess of Vidarbha, got up as usual before dawn and was taken aback to find her husband's bed empty. It was so unlike him. Usually, he woke up after she had made preparations for him to offer worship at the *Brahma muhurta*, the sacred hour.

At first Rukmini thought that he must have gone to the sea for his bathe, but his invariable practice was to meet both his wives before going to the sea for his ritual bathe.

Rukmini's heart sank as a doubt arose in her mind: Could he have gone to find *Syamantaka*?

She went up to the room where Shaibya slept. 'Is the lord here?' she asked in an anxious voice, very different from the clear, steady voice in which the Princess of Vidarbha generally spoke.

'No. Why?' asked Shaibya in surprise.

'He has gone,' said Rukmini.

'Gone! Where to?' asked Shaibya, surprised at Krishna's action. He was always meticulous about

receiving their greetings before he went for his bathe. 'The Great God alone knows,' replied Rukmini helplessly.

'Let us go to the armoury. He may be there, polishing his weapons,' said Shaibya.

'There is no need to go to the armoury,' said Rukmini, as tears sprang to her eyes. 'His diadem, *Chakra* and sword, even his *Pitambar*,¹ are placed carefully on his bed. Even his girdle is placed on his bed. Let us go to the Eldest (Balarama) and inform him.'

Revati, Balarama's wife, when she heard about Krishna's disappearance, took Shaibya and Rukmini to where Balarama was having happy dreams in the early hours of the morning. They woke him up and told him that Krishna had disappeared.

'Disappeared!' exclaimed Balarama, shaking off his drowsiness. He had, as was usual with him, imbibed quite a liberal portion of *Sura*² which he called 'nectar', and loved to stay in bed till its effects had worn off.

'I am sure that he has been kidnapped,' said Rukmini in an agitated voice, which was quite rare with her, for she was usually self-composed.

'Kidnapped! By whom?' asked Balarama, shaking his leonine head to fully realise that he was not dreaming.

'Who else? That wretch, Satrajit. To prevent the lord from finding *Syamantaka*,' said Rukmini.

'Don't worry. I will soon bring him back,' said Balarama. Then he hurriedly went to the sea, had a hasty bathe, returned home and changed his clothes. Then, taking his favourite weapon, the plough, with its formidable copper share, he went in search of Satrajit.

People were surprised to see Balarama so early in the morning, going to Satrajit's mansion with his plough in his hand, his eyes ablaze with wrath.

Some people followed him at a respectable distance, intrigued by the thought that something unusual was going to happen.

Balarama, when he arrived at the outer gateway

of the courtyard of Satrajit's mansion, shook it with a blow on the doors.

The guards rushed to the gate, surprised that anyone should have the temerity to give such a thundering rap. They opened the small spy window and were taken aback to see no less a person than Balarama angrily knocking in impatient wrath.

'Open the doors,' Balarama ordered the guards.

The guards folded their hands and humbly said: 'Lord, we must first have our master's permission.'

'I don't need anybody's permission,' said Balarama. 'So much for your gateway,' he said and gave so thunderous a blow with his plough to the doors of the gateway that their planks were shattered to pieces. The guards backed away from the falling splinters.

Balarama walked into the courtyard. 'Ask your master to come here at once,' he ordered the guards. 'I want to talk to him.'

'Lord, please come in. I will inform the master that the lord wants to see him,' said one of the guards, respectfully folding his hands. The others stood away from him out of reach of the plough, for all the Yadavas were familiar with the violent moods of the otherwise genial giant.

Bhangakara, on hearing that Balarama had crashed the gateway down, came running from inside the house. 'Lord, come into the house. Father will be glad to meet you,' he said.

'I want Satrajit here and now. Tell him to come here. If I enter your mansion, it will only be to hurl it down,' said Balarama.

Outside the gateway, the doors of which had been shattered, stood a crowd of Yadavas. Inside, the male members of the family and the guards had gathered to see what was happening, though from a safe distance. They did not know to what lengths Balarama would go.

Hurriedly, Satrajit came out of his mansion, with one of his sons, Vatapati, preceded by Bhangakara. He could not understand why Balarama was here in

such an angry mood, and why, in his impatience, he had shattered the outer gateway. He was already in distress at how things were shaping; the shattering of the doors of his mansion, he realised, was a fatal blow to his prestige.

He folded his hands and said: 'Noble son of Vasudeva, please come into the house.'

'I told your son that I am not going to enter your mansion. If I do, it will only be to hurl it down over your head. Where have you hidden Krishna?' demanded Balarama in a threatening voice.

'Krishna! How should I know where he is?' asked Satrajit, unable to understand what this pothor was about.

'You don't know where he is, don't you?' shouted Balarama. 'You are telling lies. Produce Krishna here and now. You kidnapped him last night.'

Satrajit was dumbfounded. He could not understand the meaning of Balarama's words. With great difficulty he managed to say: 'I kidnap Krishna! What did you say, noble son of Vasudeva?'

'Will you produce him or not? Tell me so that I can know what to do,' said Balarama decisively.

Satrajit was aghast at this new development. He folded his hands again and said: 'Noble son of Vasudeva, you tell me that Krishna has disappeared, but this is the first I have heard of it.'

Balarama shook his head in disbelief. 'You tried to murder him the other day. You were not able to. Now you have kidnapped him,' he said.

'Noble Vaasudeva, I tell you by my father's sacred memory that I don't know anything about Krishna's disappearance,' said Satrajit.

'All right. If what you say is true, then come with me to the noble King and satisfy him,' said Balarama.

Satrajit looked around. He first thought that he would resist Balarama, but the thought vanished as soon as it was formed. His guards were standing at a distance, afraid to come within the reach of Bala-

rama's plough. He could also visualise the terrific consequences which he would have to face for assaulting Balarama; he was already feeling that assaulting Krishna had been an irretrievable blunder on his part. He parleyed for time.

'I have yet to complete my morning ritual, noble Vaasudeva. I was half-way through it when you came,' said Satrajit.

'Listen to me, son of Nighna. When I tell you to come, you have to do it, ritual or no ritual. Otherwise, I will drag you to the royal presence,' said Balarama.

'But, how can I come?' begged Satrajit. 'I have not finished my ritual. I have to put on the necessary robes for meeting the King,' he added.

'Will you stop talking? Once and for all, I tell you: You come with me or I will take you there,' said Balarama and took a step towards Satrajit.

Suddenly Uddhava made his way through the crowd standing outside the gateway and came up to Balarama. Balarama bent his head to listen to Uddhava's whispered message.

'Eldest, the venerable Vasudeva has looked into the matter closely. Krishna seems to have gone of his own accord, after changing into a hunter's dress,' whispered Uddhava.

Balarama chuckled. He enjoyed the mess he had made, but he wanted to retrieve his position. 'I have told Satrajit to come to the noble King,' he whispered back to Uddhava. 'He will have to obey and come with me.'

Suddenly the guards who had collected there parted, as one of them brought a terrified groom up to Satrajit. His hair was dishevelled, his feet bleeding, his body bruised, his eyes wild like those of a maniac. He prostrated himself and placed his head on Satrajit's feet.

'Lord, lord! Lord Prasena has departed for the abode of the Gods,' he said and broke into sobs.

'What?' asked Satrajit, startled. 'Where is the

noble Prasena?' He felt dazed and pressed his hand on his brow.

Seeing the dazed look in their father's eyes, his sons came up to him.

The groom trembled in every limb and in an almost choking voice repeated: 'Lord, a lion killed him.'

Satrajit could not believe his ears. 'A lion killed him! How do you know?' he asked.

'I was riding on my pony just behind his. A lion jumped on the lord,' replied the groom, trembling for his very life and expecting death any moment.

'What happened?' mumbled Satrajit, unable to speak clearly. When he understood the significance of the news, he went pale.

Seeing his father growing pale, Bhangakara supported him by throwing an arm round his waist.

Satrajit looked in one direction and then in another and scarcely knew how to ask another question. Then he mumbled again: 'Did you see the noble Prasena killed?' His voice was so low that Bhangakara had to repeat the question.

'I did not wait to see that, lord. But I saw the lion jumping on him with a frightful roar. I also saw him falling from his pony. My pony turned back, threw me on the ground and ran for its life,' replied the groom.

'Prasena killed! Prasena killed!' exclaimed Satrajit. His eyes became wild with terror. He muttered: '*Syamantaka*, *Syamantaka*. Oh, God Surya!' He tottered and tried to place his hands on Bhangakara's shoulders, but before he could do so, he collapsed on to the ground.

'Bhangakara, I am going now,' said Balarama. 'Ask your father to come to the noble King as soon as he recovers. Don't put me to the trouble of fetching him myself.' Smiling to himself, he left Satrajit's mansion.

Bhangakara and his brothers, aided by the guards, lifted the unconscious Satrajit and carried him to his bed inside the house.

PRASENA'S FATE

The sunrise was still a long way off.

Krishna got up, went to the sea for his bathe and performed his morning ritual. Then he returned to the mansion and, going to the room in which his arms and clothes were kept, put on the dress of an ordinary hunter—a very long strip of cloth wound fold by fold into a high head-dress; a short, roughly-woven *dhoti* tucked up above the knees to permit the free movement of the legs; a scarf tied round his waist to serve as a waistband; and wooden sandals tied to his ankles by strips of leather.

He selected a bow made of bamboo, like the one ordinarily used by common hunters, with arrows to match, and tied to his waistband a big knife properly sheathed.

Finally, he took a scythe in his hand, and with an amused smile pushed his favourite flute—his constant companion in boyhood—which he rarely played now, into his waistband.

Quietly he went into the kitchen and filled a small bag with a few *baatis*¹ and sweets, and slung it on his shoulder.

He then left his mansion and took the way to the forest.

The strange happenings of the last three days were forming into a pattern in his mind.

Prasena, Satrajit's brother, boisterous and rowdy, ever ready to play a part in an affray, had left in the middle of the night on a mysterious mission. Why was he sent out of Dwaraka when Satrajit was planning a confrontation with the Elders, wanting to threaten them into accepting that he, Krishna, had stolen Sya-

mantaka? His departure might have something to do with the disappearance of the jewel.

He could not believe that the disappearance of Satyaki and Satyaa could possibly be a lovers' escapade. Satyaki had no secrets from him. On their journey to Hastinapura, he had narrated the episode of how Satyaa had kidnapped him; how she had saved him from being assassinated by her father's ruffians; how she had taken a promise from him to further her ambition to marry him, Krishna.² It was more likely that they had gone to bring back *Syamantaka*, so that he, Krishna, could be cleared of the infamous charge.

He knew Satyaki well. Loyal friend that he was, he was always ready to lay down his life for him. It would be natural for him to go on a mission to find *Syamantaka*.

The only possible explanation of their simultaneous disappearance, he thought, was that Satyaa knew where her father had hidden the jewel and had secured Satyaki's help in the venture of finding it. It was foolish, very foolish, of them both—however anxious they were to save him—to start on a silly venture which would bring disrepute to both of them and do him no good.

The more he thought, the more convinced he was that Satyaa, in her folly, had taken this suicidal step to find the jewel and save him.

It must be so, he thought. Satyaa had composed the so-called missing lines of the *Farewell by a Hero's Wife* as a message to him. Rukmini was wrong in thinking that the lines were intended as a rebuke to her and Shaibya.

When he had talked to Satrajit the other day, he had stated that she was ignorant of the song and that, therefore, she would be a misfit in the family of Satyaka, pledged as it was to *Kshaatra dharma*, the code of heroic righteousness.

She did not know all the lines of the song; naturally her pride was wounded; that was why she wanted Subhadra to recite them all for her.

She wanted to prove that she knew how to be a hero's wife better than others—foolish girl that she was—by risking her father's prestige, her own reputation, her very life.

Both of them were very rash. His *Dharma* was to save them from infamy and danger, whatever happened to *Syamantaka*. 'Why do people who love me seek to help me in a way which imposes a heavier burden on me?' he muttered to himself.

If Satyaa knew that Prasena was the bearer of the jewel, she would naturally take the path that he had taken. Where was Prasena carrying the jewel, he wondered.

Satrajit, he knew, had surrounded himself with a divine halo by claiming that he had performed penance by reciting the *gayatri mantra* ten million times, fasting all the time in a place which he claimed was the sacred cave of the God Surya, protected by divine guardians. Nobody knew where the sacred cave was; many thought that it did not exist at all. But if there was one, and if Satyaa knew that the jewel had been taken there by Prasena, she must have gone to it. But where was it?

Krishna briskly took to the path, so familiar to him, which led to the dense forest surrounding Mount Ujjayanta.

As the dawn broke, he came across the few hunting lodges which the Yadava chiefs had built at the foot of the Mount. Satrajit's lodge was closed; they must have proceeded further, he thought.

A little further Krishna came across three paths going up the Mount. Only one of them had been frequently used by human beings and ponies during the last few days. He took it.

As the sun rose, the whole forest was tinted with gold. A new life came to creation. The morning breeze, so cool and refreshing, rustled among the tree-tops. The birds began to twitter happily. Herds of deer, seeing him, fled to the safety of the thick vegetation.

Krishna thought of Satrajit's conduct during the last few days. How strange were the ways of men? However much he tried to bring them back to the path of *Dharma*, they would never tread it.

Satrajit had a family, mansions, gold, horses, herds of cattle. He could be the happiest of men if he knew how to be happy. Why then was he out to destroy him, Krishna, who had worked ceaselessly to rescue the Yadavas of Dwaraka from fear, poverty, internecine quarrels, and the wrath of Emperor Jarasandha, and given them a high status among the Aryans? On the contrary, on the slightest pretext they quarrelled, inspired by fear, jealousy or anger, leaving him once again to reconstruct their life of *Dharma*.

It was true that no one of any consequence believed in his being guilty of stealing *Syamantaka*, but his moral authority over them would disappear if he did not risk his life to secure it. Men, he felt, could only be kept on the path of *Dharma* if they were moved, from time to time, to feel a collective passion for heroic deeds, by someone who, they thought, could work miracles.

Krishna was also amused at the strange ways of the planets which presided over his own destiny at his birth.

Only a few weeks ago, he was helping the Five Brothers to found the City of Indraprastha and organize a kingdom. Now he was charged with stealing *Syamantaka* like a village thief by this man Satrajit who thought that men and women were created for his sake alone.

The forest was now lit by the rising sun. The sunshine filtering through the leaves of the trees made lovely patterns on the ground.

Krishna plucked the wild fruits which grew in abundance and ate them and drank the water of the stream which gurgled downhill.

As he proceeded further, he heard vultures screeching. When he hurried to the spot, he saw them feasting on the flesh of two dead bodies, screeching

with joy or hovering and wheeling over them.

Kites and small birds were picking up little bits of flesh dropped by the vultures. Foxes too were there, driving the vultures away and enjoying the flesh which was still left on the skeletons.

Approaching one of the bodies cautiously, Krishna frightened the vultures away by waving his scythe.

The skeleton of a horse lay on the spot. A saddle was tied to it.

He turned his attention to the other body, over which the vultures were feasting. It was the carcass of a man.

Krishna shot an arrow at a vulture which was picking whatever flesh was left on it. Pierced by the arrow, it fluttered to the ground, tried to rise and fell down dead. The other vultures, screeching in fear, rose in the air.

Krishna shot at another vulture when it tried to return to the carcass; it fell down dead; its companions flew away.

It was the gruesome carcass of a man. The beard and the hair still clung to what was once a face and a head. Tatters which had once been his *dhoti* still clung to the girdle. A bow, a quiver filled with arrows and a sword lay by the side of the carcass. His spine was broken in two as if by the blow of some mighty hand. Obviously no human being had killed the man; it was the work of some powerful animal.

Krishna bent down and tried to identify the man. He examined with care the apparel, ornaments and arms of the deceased. The scarf, though torn, was costly. The girdle was of gold with the image of the Sun God in the centre; it was similar to the one worn by Satrajit. Even the shaft of the bow had the same symbol.

A sudden recognition flashed across Krishna's mind.

It was the carcass of Prasena, the brother of Satrajit.

URI DOES IT

Perhaps he was on the right track, Krishna felt. Perhaps Prasena was commissioned to leave *Syamantaka* at the sacred cave of the God Surya, which was in the charge, according to Satrajit, of divine guardians. That would be a safe place to hide it till his charge against Krishna was accepted by the Yadavas.

Krishna carefully searched Prasena's belongings lying scattered about the place, but could find no trace of the jewel. All that he could find was a part of a gold chain, from which perhaps *Syamantaka* had been suspended. Man or beast, whoever attacked Prasena, must have torn the chain off his neck and carried away the jewel, leaving this part behind.

Krishna left Prasena's carcass to the vultures, collected his ornaments and arms lying scattered on the ground and buried them in a pit, covering it with a stone to identify the spot.

The path through the forest, now very dense, was narrow with thorny undergrowth on both sides. The rays of the sun could not penetrate through the tree-tops, which, with their ample foliage, mingled into one another.

Where did this narrow path lead to? He decided to take it even if the sacred cave did not exist, for that was the only way in which he could find *Syamantaka*.

He had scarcely gone a few hundred steps when he found that vultures were feeding on another carcass which lay beyond the undergrowth.

Krishna, with his scythe, made his way through the dense undergrowth to a little opening where he found the carcass of a lion, on which the vultures were feeding.

He shot a vulture dead; the others fled, wheeling in circles overhead. The flesh on the lion's body had almost disappeared. What was left was the gruesome skeleton of the royal beast with its ribs broken.

On examining the skeleton of the lion, Krishna found a piece of Prasena's scarf still clinging to one of the lion's paws. Sticking to the nail of another paw was a piece of black, hairy skin, most probably that of a bear. One or more bears must have killed the lion, he concluded; no other beast could have so thoroughly sniffed at the ant-hill to feed on the swarms of ants.

All around, there were traces of a grim struggle between the lion and one or two powerful bears.

Krishna made a close search for the jewel, but found no trace of it. If the jewel was brought to the forest by Prasena—as he felt sure it was—the lion, when it killed him, must have snatched the gold chain from which *Syamantaka* was suspended; part of it was left behind; the remaining part of the chain with the jewel must have stuck to the lion's teeth, and, when the bears killed the lion, they must have carried it away.

How was that possible? How could a diamond interest a lion or a bear? Perhaps the magic quality which Satrajit claimed for it might have attracted the beasts by instinct. If the bears had the jewel, where could they have taken it to? To search for it in this vast forest was an impossibility.

There was no trace of Satyaa or Satyaki. They did not appear to have passed this way. Where had they gone?

On a close scrutiny of the spot, Krishna discovered that only one bear was engaged in the struggle against the lion. The other, strangely enough, had stood aside; it was difficult to decide whether it was a bear or a man because the footprints of a bear and a human being are very similar.

The sun was about to set by the time his search was complete. He, therefore, proceeded a little further along the path, and climbed a tree to spend the night on one of its branches.

He settled himself on one of the largest branches. He recollected that once the Master, Veda Vyasa, had called him *Hrishikesh*, master of his mind and body, and thereafter Balarama as a joke had always teased him for not knowing the delights of a sleep.

Though he sat on the branch surrounded by the forest, he did not feel himself lost. In the starlight, he could see an owl sitting on another of the branches, staring at him with round, lustrous eyes, and concentrated hostility. Twice it hooted, and, in response, he whistled. He also saw two rabbits coming near the tree, resting for a while and then running away.

After midnight, a lioness, with her shining eyes, walked past the tree, with two of her cubs, all of them pacing slowly as if in grief at the death of the head of the family. Later he heard the cry lions give when they kill; perhaps the lioness and its cubs were feasting on the prey.

He watched the Seven Primeval Sages (*Ursa Major*) moving majestically through the heavens, and heard with delight the twitter of the birds welcoming the dawn.

When the sun rose, lighting up the forest, he came down from the tree, took his bathe in the stream which ran parallel to the path, performed his morning ritual and took a part of the food which he had with him, supplemented by the wild fruits which grew in plenty.

He decided to follow the footprints of the bears. When he had gone a little further, he found that a game-trail joined the path which he was following. His heart bounded with joy when he found that a man and a woman had come by this trail and turned into the main one. The footprints must be Satyaa's and Satyaki's; the path which he was following must therefore lead to the sacred cave.

A little further on he heard the growl of a wolf and the angry mewling of a cat. Hastily he ran to the spot, where he saw a cat running up a tree with a kitten in her mouth and the head of the wolf thrust into the hollow of the tree; he also heard coming from it the

squeak of a weak and tremulous kitten.

The wolf withdrew its head from the hollow with the kitten in its mouth. Krishna took his bow from his shoulder and let fly an arrow. The next moment, the wolf, after trying to run away, rolled on the ground, howling piteously. Another arrow ended its life.

Krishna walked up to the wolf as it was gasping for breath. The kitten, now dead, had dropped from its jaws. When the wolf was dead, he withdrew from its body the arrows, dripping in blood, and wiped them clean with some green leaves.

He looked into the hollow where lay another kitten, almost dying of the wounds inflicted by the teeth of the voracious wolf. 'Poor thing,' he muttered.

Krishna looked at the cat which was waiting for the danger to pass. 'Come down, you are quite safe,' he shouted to the cat with a friendly gesture.

Krishna wanted to resume his journey, when the cat came down from the tree and dropped the kitten which was in her mouth near his feet, rubbing her body against his legs joyfully.

'Great God, it is the wretched Uri!' exclaimed Krishna in delight. 'How did you happen to come here?' If Uri was here, her mistress could not be far away.

Evidently, Uri had accompanied her mistress so far and then parted company with her. She had prepared a bed of soft leaves in the hollow of the tree for herself and performed the miracle of bringing her kittens into the world in this strange place.

Krishna took Uri in his arms, and affectionately stroked her dirty fur, once so white and shining. Then, dropping her to the ground, he gently took up the blind kitten, which had inherited black spots from its father, and placed it against his chest to give it warmth.

Uri arched herself and gleefully went round and round Krishna's legs, giving vent to her gratitude by purring happily. He carried Uri and the kitten to the

stream, washed them clean, took a bathe and offered his midday prayers.

While he was bathing and performing his ritual, Uri had secured a meal for herself by catching a fish from the stream and was lying lazily on the ground, suckling the blind relic of her litter, which was a wonderful living toy, and a thing of beauty with its matted fur.

To leave his hands free, Krishna loosened the folds of his head-dress and put the blind little kitten into two of them, leaving its beautiful little head uncovered. Its hunger having been satisfied, it quietly went to sleep.

Krishna came back to the narrow forest path and was in a hurry to move on. But as he tried to proceed, Uri stood on the path barring his progress by standing between his feet and beginning to mew fiercely at him.

By now, Krishna had begun to understand Uri's language; her happiness was expressed by a purr; her disapproval by walking away; her glee by rubbing against his body; her anger by a loud "mi-aaow"; her decisiveness by an obstinate way of behaving; her grief by a plaintive mewing; her contempt for erring human beings by walking away indifferently with her tail erect. And she had an uncanny gift of understanding human speech and replying to it by her own code of communication.

In Gokul and Vrindavan, when he was a boy, he recollected, he had been able to understand and respond to the mode of communication of his cows and bulls; later, in Mathura, everyone envied him the way he understood the language of horses. He was now surprised to find that a cat, which was usually called *dushtatma* (the wicked one), could hold a conversation as if she was gifted with speech.

He did not know that, since she was a kitten, her mistress had carried on conversations with her whenever they were by themselves.

Much as he would have liked to hurry on his search,

Krishna felt that Uri wanted him to do something else. When he stopped, she turned towards a little opening in the thicket and waited for him to follow.

Krishna tried to coax the obstinate cat to move forward, but she would not heed his instructions. She wanted him to keep her company on some other mission.

Krishna gave up the attempt to induce Uri to change her mind. He felt that she knew what she was doing. She went through the opening in the undergrowth and waited for him on the other side of the thicket.

Krishna, while hacking his way through the thicket, saw some small strips of coloured cloth, evidently torn off the skirt of a woman who had passed that way. He was almost certain that she must be Satyaa.

With his scythe, Krishna opened a path through the undergrowth and after some difficulty reached the other side.

Uri led him on further till they reached the edge of a cliff. Standing on it, she mewed pathetically. Krishna went up to her. A few cubits below the cliff, Satyaa was lying on the ground. His heart missed a beat. Was she dead?

Immediately he made a path for himself, climbed down the cliff and ran to where the body lay.

Satrajit's daughter was lying unconscious on the ground. A few strips of cloth, which had once been parts of her skirt, had remained attached to the string that had fastened it. She was bruised all over: thorns had torn her skin in places. Her face was covered with streaks of dried blood which had flowed from a bruised wound in her head.

He ran to her. She was not dead as he had thought. She was breathing. As she had fallen from the cliff, her head had hit the ground and concussion had followed, rendering her unconscious.

Placing the kitten near Uri, who was all too ready to feed it, Krishna unfolded his head-dress, tore a

piece of cloth from it and bound the wound. Another and a bigger piece, he wrapped around her loins. He arranged the torn fragments of her bodice and tied them with a narrow strip of cloth to serve as a covering for her breasts.

'Oh, Great God, what has she done to herself!' said Krishna to himself.

As Krishna looked at Satyaa's shrunken face, plastered with blood, her hair all tangled, and her all-too-perfect limbs bruised, he was greatly moved.

Tenderness surged in his heart. This young maiden, brought up in luxury, had set her heart on winning him. Rejected as a suitable match for his son by Satyaka, the head of one of the most eminent families in Dwaraka, she had run away with Satyaki and faced death so that he could redeem his pledge, with the certain knowledge that, even if she saved him, she was doomed. After the escapade, no young Yadava chief, nor her father, would accept her.

He folded up what was left of the cloth of his head-dress, lifted her on to his shoulders, climbed the cliff, and laid her on the ground while he made a bigger opening in the undergrowth. Then he lifted her again and, preceded by Uri carrying the kitten in her mouth, went to the stream.

THE SACRED CAVE

Satyaa recovered consciousness for a little while and tried to open her eyes. There was pain all over her body. Her head was heavy as a stone. She also felt as if she was in another world—too real to be dream-land and too strange to be real.

It was no longer her body, she felt; it was a bundle of painful limbs. She was no longer in the thorny thicket through which she had escaped; that was the last event of which she had any memory.

She was lying by the side of a stream which fell from boulder to boulder in musical cascades.

She felt tired, tired beyond endurance. She closed her eyes....

When she opened her eyes again, she did not know how long she had lain unconscious, but felt that the world in which she was, was real.

Where was she? How did she come to be here? Why was a man, a stranger, taking the liberty of washing her limbs? She wanted to protest against this strange man touching her, but the words were choked in her throat.

Dreams floated in and out of her mind. She saw her father picking up Krishna's earring.... She was inclined to sing a song. What was it? Some lines which she had composed herself. It was a song—*The Farewell of a Hero's Wife*. Yes.... She wanted to be fit to be the wife of a hero. She felt too tired to recollect the lines.

The picture of her uncle Prasena taking leave of her father in the middle of the night came before her eyes. Where was he? Then there were the fearful bears from which she had fled.

Memory came back to her. The bears had lifted Satyaki and carried him away. Before they could turn their attention to her, she had run through the undergrowth....

When she came out of the thicket, her feet were bleeding, her clothes were torn. She ran and ran. Something happened; she could not recollect what it was. Perhaps she died....

Someone was washing the wound on her head with a soft hand. Now he was cleaning her hair which had stuck to her temples and re-arranging it. Who was he? And how could he dare to touch her body?....

She tried to concentrate her mind, but could not; it was so difficult to keep her eyes open for a long time....

The man was putting a bandage round her head.....

She felt the warmth of a fire. Someone was applying the hot steaming leaves of some plant to her body. There was the welcome smell of something being baked; she was very hungry.

She thought that it could not be anything but a dream. So she closed her eyes tightly and immediately opened them again. She was not dreaming—that was certain.

The man was cleaning her bruises with a wet piece of cloth—her face, her hips, in fact her whole body. She wanted to get up and strike the man, for he was behaving shamelessly, but she had no energy left.

Now the man was kneeling by her side. She opened her eyes and gazed at him.

It was not a strange face at all. In all the years since childhood, she would have given her life to see this face—a face so unfamiliar to those living in her father's house; it bore no mark of pain or fear or guilt. She must be in a dream. How could this face be near hers?

She was struck by the face. Did it express pride, arrogance or scorn? No. It had a look of serenity and innocence, a face which had nothing to hide, a face

which had no fear of being seen or of seeing.

His eyes were bright and beautiful; they had an indefinable quality of seeing life as a limitless, joyous adventure; they imparted a superlative value to himself and to the world—to himself for his ability to see; to the world for being a place so eagerly worth seeing.

Half-dazed as she was, she felt sure that she was in the presence of a divinity. She had never been so aware of a man's body. It had the hardness of irresistible strength and the grace of a youthful god. His dark colour blended with his curly hair.

She felt a strange struggle in her heart, for he was looking at her with amusement. All these years of loneliness, ugliness and struggle she had spent, she felt, were someone's senseless joke. She smiled at him and he smiled in answer as if he knew what she felt.

This could not be true; it was only a dream she was seeing....

'Govinda, Govinda,' she murmured. 'Why do you meet me in a dream? I am not fit to be a hero's wife.' And she broke into sobs.

There was no time to be wasted. 'Stop crying,' he ordered her. 'If you are in a dream, I am here in the dream too. Stop crying.'

Satyaa became conscious of the strip of cloth which she had on, instead of the long, flowing skirt which she had worn. She tried to cover her limbs by pulling at the narrow piece of cloth in which she was wrapped.

His eyes danced in merriment; they were those of a naughty boy. 'The cloth is not large enough to cover your whole body. You must be content with being immodest.'

As she failed in making an attempt to get up, she broke into hysterical sobs.

Krishna gave her a cuff; that was the only way in which she could get control over the emotional crisis through which she was passing.

'Stop sobbing,' he told her in a severe tone. 'Don't try to stand. You cannot walk; your ankle is sprained.'

Don't make my task more difficult than it is.'

'All right, you can do what you like with me,' she murmured in self-disgust. She closed her eyes, to forget, if possible, how immodestly she was dressed, and resigned herself to carrying out his orders.

Krishna helped her to sit up, which she did with great difficulty, and, without a word, offered her fruits, a piece of *baati*, a sweet, roots and other edibles which had been baked in the fire. She took them avidly because she was very, very hungry.

He brought water from the stream in the hollow of his joined palms for her to drink. Every time he brought water, she felt like clinging to him.

Krishna was satisfied that there was no danger to Satyaa's life. He must, therefore, move on, get out of the forest and find a cave on the peak which rose before him. They could not spend the night near the stream; they would be exposed to danger from the beasts of prey which would come there to slake their thirst after sunset.

He looked all around for Uri, but could not find her. She had placed the kitten near him and walked away. Where was that wretched creature? The little blind thing was just near his feet; it was almost leaning against him.

He would have to carry Satyaa in his arms and he had no heart to leave the blind kitten behind. He picked it up and pushed it into a small pouch which he made in the scarf he wore as a waistband, leaving its mouth uncovered.

Krishna lifted Satyaa on his shoulders and came to the forest path, where Uri was waiting for him.

'Where have you been, you wretch?' asked Krishna. The cat mewed happily in reply.

As they came out of the dense forest, the path, which was now very steep, leading up to the nearest peak, was bathed in sunshine.

'Now, Satyaa, you must walk with your right arm over my neck. I will support you with my left hand; I must have my right hand free to use the scythe if

a beast meets us,' said Krishna. 'And if danger comes, stand behind me.'

He made her stand on her unsprained foot. Then they proceeded further, Satyaa hanging on to his neck by one hand and supported by his arm.

Satyaa was in ecstasy. If it was a dream, she could wish it to go on for ever.

If it was a reality, it was worthwhile having taken all those risks to enjoy the delight of close proximity to the 'lord' of her dreams, whom she had been pining for all her life.

She knew very well that her future was doomed; she could never return to her family or be accepted by the Yadavas. But she thanked the gods for giving her these few moments of joy.

The climb was very steep and difficult. They had to pause now and again to recover their breath.

The path now turned a corner. As they rounded it, Satyaa withdrew her hand from Krishna's neck and pointed at the upper ridge of the peak, shouting excitedly: 'The sacred cave!'

Almost simultaneously, as her sprained ankle could not support her, she fell to the ground, screaming with pain. But with a trembling hand, she continued to point her finger to the upper ridge, repeating: 'That is the sacred cave.'

Krishna looked up in the direction at which she was pointing her finger.

There, against the background of the peak, stood a large boulder, scintillating as if made out of a huge, brilliant diamond. The rays of the setting sun fell directly on it; it shot them back in a myriad tiny rays.

It was a gorgeous vision, a veritable house of the Sun God.

A GHOST

‘Is that the sacred cave?’ Krishna asked Satyaa. ‘How do you know?’

‘It is the sacred cave of the God Surya,’ replied Satyaa. ‘Once when I was a child, father brought me here; the cave left such a vivid impression on me that I used to dream of it sometimes. I am sure that father performed his *tapascharya* (austerities) here to win the favour of the God Surya.’

Krishna summoned his strength and picked up Satyaa again. He decided to spend the night in the cave.

Throughout, Krishna kept a watchful eye on the foot-tracks of those who had gone before him. There was no doubt that one of the tracks belonged to a powerful bear; at one place a rock had been rolled away by the bear to get at the ants and grub; at another he had struck down a doe, eaten his fill and hidden the rest of the carcass behind a stone.

Krishna negotiated the height. There was no doubt about it; it was the cave of the God Surya. On the scintillating rock near the mouth of the cave was carved, with considerable skill, the God Surya, riding his chariot drawn by seven horses.

Krishna was puzzled. Where had Satyaki been taken? Where were the guardians of the cave? Where was *Syamantaka*, if this was the end of its journey? Where had the bear whose tracks he had observed gone?

The sun would soon be setting, and Krishna was exasperated at the slow progress they had made. He placed Satyaa at the entrance of the cave. He recited the sacred *gayatri mantra* invoking the God Surya, humbly offered a few green leaves and entered the cave to

examine it carefully before installing Satyaa in it. A beast of prey might well have made its lair there.

The inside of the cave was not dark as he had expected. Sunlight coming through the fissures in the ceiling made patches of light on the walls and the walls responded by reflecting the rays. If Satrajit had performed austerities here, there was something in his claim that the God Surya had given him *Syamantaka* in this very cave as a boon.

Krishna shouted: 'Is there anyone there?' There was no response, excepting the echo of his own voice.

Two persons appeared to have occupied the cave recently. There were two beds of green leaves showing that they had slept there. They also appeared to have built a fire to warm the cave when they slept.

Where were those men who had slept here? He shouted again; there was no response.

However, there appeared to be some truth in Satrajit's claim that the cave was protected by divine guardians; if the beds had been occupied by the divine guardians, where were they now?

He found a niche in one of the walls of the cave which had evidently served as a shrine. A few withered flowers placed there in an act of worship were lying in it, and, wonder of wonders, a few grains of gold! This must be the place, concluded Krishna, where Satrajit had worshipped *Syamantaka* on his last visit to the cave.

He cleared away the two beds of green leaves, built a fire to warm the cave, prepared a fresh bed of leaves for Satyaa and lifted her on to it.

Then Krishna began to explore the cave and found that, at one end, the floor of the cave sloped down for a couple of cubits to the mouth of a tunnel. Knife in hand he entered it lest some animal should attack him. A few steps more, and he found himself in ankle-deep water, and drew back from what looked like a pool.

The narrow, winding tunnel was evidently the bed of a stream which now flowed on the other side of the

cave. The fall of a boulder had altered its course, leaving a pool which was being continuously replenished by fresh water which flowed in and out of it through the crevices under it. He threw a stone into the centre of the pool, saw it sink down to the bottom and found that the pool was only waist-deep.

His eyes now being accustomed to the semi-darkness, he was able to observe a series of stones forming a sort of bridge over the pool. He stepped from stone to stone and jumped on to a big flat stone on the other side of the pool. The tunnel had reached its furthest end; however, on its wall to the right, there was a hole large enough to let a man or beast crawl through.

The hole opened into another cave at a higher level. It was like a vaulted chamber, lit by an overhead fissure, which threw little patches of sunshine. The walls did not reflect the rays.

He could see that the upper cave shrank into a steep passage, which was lost in gloom. This passage appeared to connect the sacred cave with the upper plateau of Mount Raivataka between the first peak and other high peaks. It was through this narrow passage that the captors of Satyaki must have gone. Any danger, therefore, that could come to them would only be through this hole.

Uri, who had kept him company, easily went through the hole into the other cave, expecting him to follow.

‘Come back, Uri. I am going back,’ said Krishna.

She came back, bringing something in her mouth. Krishna took it from her and examined it in the sunshine. He found that it was a piece of the gold chain, a part of which he had found on the spot where the dead body of Prasena lay. Its significance was clear; whoever brought that part of the chain to the upper cave must have taken *Syamantaka* with him.

When he returned to the sacred cave, he found Satyaa sleeping soundly. He brought some water for her from the pool, by dipping one end of his scarf in water. He took a few drops in his palm, mixed it

with some small crumbs of *baati*, squeezed in a few drops of lemon which he had collected on the way and shook Satyaa awake. Though awake, she opened her mouth with some difficulty; but ultimately she swallowed the paste and took the water.

He piled up the fire, which was the only way to warm the cave and ward off beasts of prey.

Krishna took Uri to the mouth of the tunnel and made her lie down there. If she stayed there, she would be a good watchman, he thought. But as soon as she fed the blind kitten, she returned to where Satyaa was sleeping, and brought her kitten with her.

It was imperative that Uri should guard the cave against any unwelcome persons coming from the tunnel. He picked up the kitten and placed it again at the mouth of the tunnel and invited Uri to come to it. She came, took the kitten in her mouth and went back to Satyaa. Uri wanted both her kitten and her mistress beside her.

Ultimately, to force Uri, he picked up the little blind kitten and cradled it in his arms. Then he asked Uri to come to the mouth of the tunnel and pointed out the place where she was to sleep. Convinced that her kitten was safe in Krishna's arms, she laid down herself on the spot he had chosen for her.

The fire warmed the cave; Satyaa slept on peacefully. Krishna took the kitten to sleep with him.

The kitten at first snuggled against Krishna for some time, but driven by its voracious appetite, quietly left his side and sniffed its way to where Uri lay. Krishna watched it with interest. Its hunger satisfied, it again began to sniff the ground and found its way back to him. It was a lovely sight to see, this blind kitten coming to him on its wobbly legs, finding the direction by its sniffs. Instinctively it found greater security with him than with its mother. 'You are wonderful,' Krishna said to it and put an assuring hand on it.

The next morning, Krishna got up, took his bathe in the pool and came out in front of the sacred cave.

The outer walls of the cave, reflecting the sun's rays, looked magnificent. He had never come across such scintillating rocks before.

When he returned to the cave, Satyaa was sitting huddled on her bed of leaves and, her face hidden between her knees, was sobbing piteously.

Uri had already left to forage for a meal in the forest.

'O, you are all right now,' remarked Krishna.

Satyaa did not look up. When Krishna came up to her, she pulled up the meagre piece of cloth in which her body was wrapped, to make sure that nothing, except her face, was left uncovered.

'Now, Satyaa, you had better stop crying,' said Krishna in a soothing tone. 'You can't walk and crying won't help you. I have soaked my scarf in water and brought it to you. You can clean your body.'

She hid her face between her knees and murmured: 'Oh, please, let me be. I will get up and go to the pool myself.'

Krishna smiled in amusement. Then he scolded her like a schoolmaster: 'Satyaa, stop your crying. I will give you days and nights to cry in, but later.'

Krishna was then stern. 'You must realise the dangers of the situation in which we are.'

Satyaa again hid her head between her knees and began to sob.

'Listen, this is no time for crying nor for sentiment, not even for looking after your modesty. You came to find *Syamantaka*—fool that you were—and added to my difficulties. You were frightened when some bears or men carried away Satyaki and to escape them passed through the thicket.'

Satyaa started sobbing again and murmured: 'I wish I were dead.'

'I wish you were wiser,' said Krishna. 'You fell into a pit. Only a few shreds of your skirt were about you.' Then he smiled. 'You were just as when your mother bore you; mostly, I mean.'

Satyaa began sobbing again.

'Listen,' said Krishna in a severe tone. 'I tied up your wound, wrapped your loins with a piece of my head-gear. Then I took you to the stream, built a fire to foment your sprained ankle. Lastly, I carried you to this cave in my arms and forced you to eat something.'

She looked up, tried to rise, but fell down.

'Don't try to stand,' Krishna told her. 'For a day or two, you will not be able to walk without support. I want you to realise the position in which you are, if you have any sense left in you. You cannot go back to Dwaraka alone.'

Satyaa responded by a few more sobs. 'If you go back now to Dwaraka, I will not be able to keep you company; you will provide a meal for the bears or lions. I now know the direction in which Satyaki and Syamantaka were taken. I cannot leave you here alone, unprotected. We are facing a very grave danger. We can only face it if you keep your head cool and control your emotions.'

Satyaa stopped sobbing, and, with her eyes full of adoration, looked at him.

'Now you will have to behave as I ask you to,' said Krishna. 'You will have to be in my company if you want to survive.'

He smiled in amusement and continued: 'I cuffed you once to stop you from going hysterical. I will cuff you again if you do not behave. I want grown-up little girls like Subhadra and you to do as I ask them to.' He laughed aloud in amusement as Satyaa wiped the tears from her eyes.

Then her face dissolved into a smile. 'You are a tyrant.'

'Yes, worse than your father. First, I want you not to cry, whatever happens. Second, not to protest,' he began to count on his fingers. 'Third, you will sit quiet while I clean your body. Fourth, you are not to stand unless I ask you to. Fifth, you will eat whatever I give you.'

Satyaa grew saucy. 'What if I don't do it?'

Krishna persuasively remarked: 'If you behave, we may survive this danger. If you don't, both of us will be destroyed.'

'Please forgive Satyaki and me,' said Satyaa. 'We wanted to find *Syamantaka*.'

'Why could you not have waited for me?' asked Krishna.

'I suspected where it had been taken. I somehow felt convinced that *Syamantaka* must have been sent to this cave and placed in the hands of its divine guardians. It was here that the God Surya gave my father *Syamantaka* and every month he has come to worship the jewel here, offering sacrifices of goats.'

'You wanted Satyaki to come here?'

'Yes. I told him about the sacred cave.'

'Are you sure that he was taken away by two bears?'

'I was so frightened that I did not observe properly. All that I remember is that I ran away to a little opening in the undergrowth and fell over the cliff.'

'Did you see the dead bodies of Prasena and his horse?' asked Krishna.

'No. We took the path which we thought was the shortest, but we lost our way in the forest. Only with great difficulty could we find the trail which joined the path by which you came.'

Krishna showed the two parts of the chain which he had found. 'Do you know to whom this chain belongs?'

Satyaa looked at it carefully. 'It is the chain which my father wore and from which *Syamantaka* was suspended.'

'But where did the bears come from and where did they go?' asked Krishna. 'I have carefully observed the footprints of the bear. The bear and its companion came to this cave and disappeared.'

'Let us not waste time,' continued Krishna. 'Get ready. Remove the piece of cloth in which you have

wrapped yourself; tie it around your loins in the way of the Nishada women. Don't worry about how you look. We have to find Satyaki and *Syamantaka*. If what your father said was true, the guardians of the cave will soon be here; then we shall have to fight them.'

'How can I fight? I cannot even get up and stand,' said Satyaa piteously.

'I will give you my hand. Come to the pool and I will clean your body.'

Just as he was going to help her to get up, Satyaa screamed wildly and fell back. 'The ghost! The ghost!' she screamed again, pointed to the mouth of the tunnel and fainted.

THE SINGING GHOST

Krishna, when he turned round, saw a weird creature with long hair reaching down to its ankles, disappearing down the tunnel. He took hold of his scythe and followed it to the pool. The creature with the long hair had already crossed the pool by springing over the stones and was wriggling through the hole into the upper cave.

Having crossed the pool and looked through the hole, Krishna saw the creature disappearing into the tunnel leading out of the upper cave, with the agility of a squirrel. It ran on legs more like a human being's than a beast's and the cave echoed to the sweet notes of a singing bird.

Krishna would have liked to follow it, but did not; he must wait till Satyaa was able to accompany him. She had thoughtlessly sacrificed everything to recover *Syamantaka* in order to save him from her father. Now she could not go back, nor be left alone; they could not live in the cave; they must go forward if *Syamantaka* was to be found and Satyaki rescued.

When he returned to the cave, Satyaa was trembling with fright. 'Was it a ghost?' she asked.

'It was a ghost, but a harmless one,' replied Krishna reassuringly. 'It fled through the hole into the upper cave and disappeared down the tunnel leading out of it. It was a curious creature; it spoke the language of the singing birds.'

'It was a ghost, I am sure,' said Satyaa, shivering. 'It must be one of the guardians of the cave that father has referred to so often.'

'Don't worry, Satyaa,' said Krishna. 'We shall follow it when you feel better.'

She said piteously: 'Don't leave me alone. I am sure it was a ghost. I have never seen a man or a beast whose hair covered the whole body down to the ankles.'

'Yes, it is true that its hair covered the whole body,' said Krishna.

He put more wood on the fire, which now blazed. They ate the wild roots and other foods which Krishna had gathered and roasted, along with the *baatis* and other sweet things that were left.

After the siesta, Satyaa felt better and could walk a little by leaning on Krishna's shoulder.

In the afternoon, Krishna went out to get more fruits, roots and other foods. He also collected some dry twigs out of which he built the fire afresh and green leaves with which they could make the beds.

Standing at the mouth of the cave, they made offerings of fruit and green leaves to the God Surya, invoking the God by chanting the *gayatri mantra*.

It was a glorious scene that was before them. The outer walls of the cave, wherever the rays of the sun touched them, scintillated like diamonds. The mountainside was covered by rows upon rows of rhythmically-waving tree-tops right down to the valley.

In the evening, reflecting the rays of the setting sun, the cave shone as if made of molten gold. It really was a cave sacred to the God Surya, both of them felt.

A little later, Satyaa was sitting with the blind kitten on her lap, but the little beauty left her and sniffed its way towards Krishna and tried to climb on to his knees. Krishna took it tenderly, and rubbed his hand over its soft fur.

'I am very jealous of you, lord,' said Satyaa. She was regaining her sauciness. 'I have brought up Uri from her birth; now she loves you more than she loves me. And this wretched kitten, blind though it is, prefers you to me.'

Krishna had an amused smile on his lips, his eyes twinkling with mischief. 'Find the answer yourself.'

Why did you rush to your doom to save my reputation?' Then he laughed. 'There must be something wrong with all of you.'

'What shall we call the kitten?' asked Satyaa.

'What would you suggest?'

'The mother I called Urvashi; I will call the kitten Menakaa,' said Satyaa.

'So, with Urvashi and Menakaa, we will have two heavenly dancers. But I will call it "Mini",' said Krishna.

The next morning, Satyaa felt better. She got up by herself. Her bruises were less painful and the wound was healing rapidly. She could go to the pool for her bathe, unassisted by Krishna.

After leaving Satyaa to take her bathe by herself, Krishna returned to the sacred cave to make their beds and keep the fire alive.

The silence of the cave was rent by a wild scream from Satyaa. He rushed back to the pool.

She was sitting on the margin of the pool, her feet in the water, trembling in every limb. When Krishna came up to her, she clung to his legs, her face pale, her eyes frightened.

'The ghost, the ghost,' she cried, pointing to the other side of the pool.

Krishna crossed the pool by jumping from stone to stone, and saw the creature with long hair going through the hole which opened into the upper cave.

Looking through the hole, he got a glimpse of the face of the ghost; it was the face of a young woman.

The ghost then ran to the tunnel, occasionally looking back to see if he was going to follow it. The upper cave was again filled with the notes of singing birds.

At first Krishna felt inclined to go to the upper cave and follow the creature, but on second thoughts, gave up his intention.

On his return from the upper cave, he saw a patch of gleaming, yellow sand, in the pool, where the water was only ankle-deep. He was surprised to find that

it was made up of tiny grains of gold. Evidently the gold which he had seen scattered before the little shrine must have come from the sands of the stream which fed the pool.

He returned to Satyaa and told her that the ghost was friendly and might help them to recover *Syaman-taka*.

As Satyaa began to prepare the beds, he said: 'Don't be afraid, Satyaa. We are going through the upper cave after I have fomented your ankle and we have taken our food. Go to sleep and gather your strength.'

He fed the fire with more twigs. He took the leaves of a medicinal herb and after warming them in the fire, applied them to her ankle. Then they partook of their frugal meal.

Uri was sunning herself outside the cave, feasting on a baby rabbit she had captured, the blind kitten by her side.

Satyaa went to sleep and Krishna, with his flute, went and stood by the hole. He had not long to wait. A little after noon, he heard the singing bird's notes, with which he was now familiar, coming from the tunnel.

He took his flute out of his waist-band and played accompanying notes upon it. The "ghost"—as Satyaa called it—stopped at once. It was evidently surprised that someone could accompany it.

Krishna continued to play the flute, improving upon the bird-like notes of the ghost. When the flute stopped, the ghost began to sing. Krishna accompanied the song on the flute.

Soon there began a duet between Krishna and the ghost. When it ceased to sing, Krishna played the flute by himself.

Satyaa limped her way to where Krishna was standing and asked: 'Did you see the ghost?'

'If it is a ghost, it is a friendly one and fond of music too. Go and collect all our things. Don't forget anything. Also bring Uri and the kitten. We

will go through the hole to meet the ghost,' said Krishna.

'But, lord,' Satyaa tried to say.

'Don't forget that we have to bring back both Satyaki and *Symantaka*,' said Krishna.

Without saying anything more, Satyaa went back to carry out Krishna's instructions.

The ghost was obstinate. It kept on singing from the upper tunnel till Satyaa arrived.

Krishna turned to Satyaa. 'Give me the knife. I will go through the hole with my chest uppermost, holding it in my hand. If you sense any danger, push my feet through the hole with all the strength you have, so that I can go through it and meet the enemy. If nothing happens, give me my bow and quiver and the scythe first. Then pass the kitten on to me and wriggle through on your hands and feet, however painful it is to do so. I will pull you out. Keep Uri back; she can easily jump through the hole.'

Krishna gave the instructions hurriedly in between playing the flute, so that the ghost could go on enjoying the duet.

'Don't interrupt my playing the flute. I don't want the ghost to feel that I am not a friend,' said Krishna.

Krishna, with his chest uppermost and the naked knife in one hand, wriggled through the opening, Satyaa pushing him forward for all she was worth.

Krishna, whilst passing through the hole, continued to play the flute. The ghost did not want to be outvied and its melodious notes filled the upper cave with music.

In a few moments he was in the upper cave which was very well lighted through the fissures overhead.

Once Krishna had crossed through, Satyaa gave him the bow, the quiver and the scythe and followed him with Mini. Uri easily jumped through the hole.

Satyaa was trembling with fear, expecting to find herself face to face with the ghost at any moment. Its notes, however, were becoming fainter. It was re-

treating farther into the tunnel, not running away from them, only tempting them to follow it.

'Where are you going, lord?' asked Satyaa, her eyes furtively looking at the tunnel, expecting the ghost to appear at once.

'Don't be afraid, Satyaa. We are being led, perhaps, to the guardians of the sacred cave. It is likely that they have kidnapped Satyaki,' said Krishna. 'Could you identify the animals who kidnapped Satyaki?' he asked her.

'Yes. There were two bears. The smaller one was not so tall as you are, very thickset and stood all the time on his hind legs. The other was a big, lumbering beast walking on all fours,' said Satyaa.

'Your "ghost" does not appear to be a bear,' said Krishna with a smile. 'I have never heard of a singing bear.'

The mouth of the tunnel opened into a dense forest, dimly lit by the sunlight filtering through the thick foliage. The stream which replenished the pool in the cave, flowed nearby.

Krishna wondered what dangers awaited them. His sense of humour, however, never left him. 'Satyaa,' he said, 'I would like your father to see you as you are now, shameless and immodest, with practically nothing on your body; with one hand on the shoulder of a shameless vagabond with a scythe in his hand and a bow on his shoulder, and the other hand holding a blind kitten; and the inevitable Uri trotting behind—all three of us proceeding cheerfully to our doom, led by a ghost.'

'Lord, I am so frightened. The ghost is sure to lead us to our death,' said Satyaa.

Krishna smiled. 'If you are so afraid of death, why did you start on this dangerous venture, which any fool would have told you was sure to end in your death?'

'Are you never afraid?' asked Satyaa shyly.

'Death is sure to come to all of us; why should I worry when it comes? For the moment I am looking

forward to meeting the ghost and perhaps the guardians of the cave, as your father called them,' said Krishna.

A breeze was blowing. The thick foliage of the trees was swaying in rhythm with it.

Satyaa, in spite of the fear which had seized her, felt happy. She was with her 'lord'; she alone shared his present life; death in his company would be a privilege.

They proceeded further along the path, whilst the "ghost" appeared to precede them, swinging from one tree to another, emitting sweet notes, sometimes those of the cuckoo, sometimes those of the singing bird, sometimes interrupting its notes by the long shrill cry of the peacock.

'Is it a ghost or a bird?' asked Satyaa.

'It is neither,' replied Krishna. 'It is a strange being.'

Satyaa suddenly clung to Krishna in fright. 'A bear! A bear! There it is!' she screamed.

A huge tall-shouldered bear emerged lazily, sniffing at ant-hills and beehives.

Krishna kept his bow and arrow in readiness to shoot if it turned towards them. 'Don't worry, Satyaa. He is not interested in eating men,' he said.

Then they saw the ghost clearly, as the foliage was not so interlocked as in the forest; it was more like a vampire with long hair flying about it. It jumped from tree-top to tree-top a little farther on, followed by monkeys.

'It is a singing vampire,' said Satyaa.

'I saw a pair of feet,' replied Krishna. 'It is neither a vampire nor a ghost.'

Uri ran in advance, mewing fiercely. They looked in the direction in which the cat had gone. What appeared to be a bear was walking erect like a human being and was coming towards them.

Satyaa, almost on the point of fainting, pointed to the creature and the bear. 'Those two kidnapped

Satyaki,' she said in an almost stifled voice, her eyes wild with fright.

Krishna slung the bow on to his shoulder and replaced the arrow in the quiver, holding his scythe in one hand, and with the other, grasping his knife.

'Satyaa, the real danger is now before us. Stand behind me. Don't expose yourself, whatever happens,' he said.

As the bears, as Satyaa thought them to be, came near, they found that one was a bear, lumbering on four feet; its companion was a man clothed in a bear-skin, kept in place by a fox-skin tied over his loins. Over his head, he had the grinning mask of a bear, giving the fearful impression of his having two faces—one a man's and the other a bear's.

He had a massive chest. His arms were long, his hands big and powerful. His abundant, grey beard almost came down to his waist. He walked as clumsily as a bear.

He had a gaunt face and fleshy nose. His large eyes could reflect kindness on occasion.

He had a sling over one shoulder and a stone hatchet in his hand.

IN THE BEAR-WORLD

Mini, the blind kitten, resting in Satyaa's arms, began to blink and see the world, and found it occupied by a huge bear. Fascinated by the sight, it jumped down out of Satyaa's arms. Satyaa shrieked; it was sniffing its way towards the bear on wobbly legs, regardless of its fate, and purring with delight.

The bear appeared to be interested in the little toy animal coming towards it and grunted a welcome.

Uri, afraid lest the bear would make an easy meal of her kitten, shot out, caught it in her mouth and was returning, when, like an unruly child, it escaped and started sniffing its way towards the bear.

The world of the bear-men between the high peaks and the sacred cave had not been invaded so far by the cat. So, when the bear-man saw the tiny animal with its attractive white and black fur walking up to the bear, he roared with laughter. He gave some orders to the bear, which approached the kitten in a very friendly manner.

'Don't be afraid of the bear,' the bear-man said to Satyaa. He spoke in the divine language of the Aryas, though haltingly and interspersing it with words from an unknown language. 'He won't hurt it. He is the son of my bear-brother.'

'Bear-brother?' asked Satyaa in surprise. 'Was your brother a bear?'

'Yes. His father and I were brothers. We were brought up together,' replied the bear-man.

Krishna had already noticed that part of the skin on the bear's shoulder had been recently torn off. It must have been, he concluded, the piece of bear-skin that he had seen in the paw of the dead lion.

'Your brother's son seems to be fearsome. When he wants to, he can smash the ribs of a lion,' said Krishna with a laugh.

The bear-man understood the significance of the remark and laughed in reply.

Krishna was impressed by the bear-man's friendly welcome, pushed his knife into his waistband and folded his hands in salutation. Satyaa did the same.

The bear-man also smilingly thrust his stone hatchet into his waistband and asked Krishna by a gesture to give him the kitten.

Krishna picked up Mini and handed it over to him. He placed it in the crook of one of his arms and began to rub its soft fur with the other hand.

After playing with the kitten for a while, the bear-man handed it back to Satyaa. Then he uttered a yell, in response to which two men joined them, accompanied by a bear each.

'Where is Satrajit?' asked the bear-man, suspiciously looking at the mouth of the tunnel. 'I thought he too would be with you, for tonight the Moon-bride will come to the bridal bed of the Ever-mighty, Ever-fearsome, Black God.'

It surprised Krishna that the bear-man had known of their coming and was ready to receive them.

'Satrajit has not come. He will never come again,' replied Krishna, and pointing to Satyaa, added: 'But this young woman is his daughter.'

The bear-man breathed a sigh of relief. 'How did you reach our land?' he asked.

'Through the cave sacred to the God Surya,' replied Krishna, and with his charming smile, added: 'We are happy to have come here; otherwise we would not have met you. We knew that the sacred cave was guarded by a great race—you and your people.'

'Do you know what crossing the sacred cave means? You cannot go back; you will have to be one of us, if the Ever-mighty, the lord of the bear-world, permits it,' said the bear-man.

'We came on a friendly visit to the king of the

bears,' said Krishna.

The bear-man laughed. 'You have come to meet the king? Here he is,' he said and slapped his chest. 'I am Jambavan, the bear-king. Who are you?' he asked.

'I am Krishna, son of Vasudeva,' replied Krishna. 'I offer my salutations to the noble bear-king,' he added and touched his feet, and so did Satyaa.

'My noble king, Ugrasena,' continued Krishna, 'and my venerable father, Vasudeva, the great chief of my people, will be very happy when I tell them that on their behalf I have offered you salutations.'

'If you return,' said the king, but did not complete the sentence.

'As a token of their friendship, I offer you my arms, noble king. Here they are,' said Krishna and handed over his arms to Jambavan with his inimitable smile, joining his hands respectfully.

Jambavan was surprised at this token of friendliness. He received the weapons with a smile on his face and handed them over to one of the bear-men who was standing by his side.

Led by Jambavan, they all proceeded by a steep path towards the forest. As they entered it, they again heard the bird-notes of the ghost at a distance. Krishna immediately responded by playing similar notes on his flute.

The bear-king turned round, smiled broadly at the way Krishna was playing on the flute, snatched it from him and tried to play it, but could not. He handed it back to Krishna and grunted with pleasure.

When the duet stopped, the bear-king, looking up at the tree-top from which the "ghost" was singing, sounded a shrill whistle by doubling his tongue with his fingers. Immediately there came a similiar response.

They reached a large plateau with about forty caves, where bears, small and big, were roaming about fearlessly and without striking fear.

The plateau was a world to itself. On two sides,

it was walled in by high peaks. On the third side, there was a sheer drop to the valley. The only access to it from the outer world was through the sacred cave.

They proceeded to the centre of the plateau where about sixty men, women and children, looking like gruesome fiends, were seated around a large community altar on which a fire was burning.

The elders were draped in bear-skins as Jambavan was; the young and the middle-aged wore only a fox-skin around their loins.

All the women wore their hair long to cover their bodies, besides a fox-skin tied over their loins. The children ran about naked, racing with bear-cubs.

Pigs, foxes and rabbits were being roasted on the fire, and also wild roots, emitting a strong smell not altogether pleasant. Wild fruits were piled up in heaps behind them.

Their loud chatter was hushed when they saw Jambavan bringing two strangers with him. Some got up from their seats to see them more clearly.

Behind the people sitting around the community altar were bears waiting for food. The mouths of some of them were tied with twisted fibre, perhaps to cure them of the vicious habit of biting.

On the whole, man and beast, between them, had created a friendly world, thought Krishna.

Krishna and Satyaa were both filled with joy at finding Satyaki seated at a little distance from the altar, but by a meaningful glance, Krishna conveyed the warning that they should not recognise each other.

The bear-king took them to a young man, seated on a pedestal in the centre of one of the sides of the community altar. He was short and powerfully built, had a black beard and wore a heavy garland of bears' teeth. Though dressed in a bear-skin and a mask like Jambavan, he did not carry a hatchet or a sling as the latter did; the tails of two bears were attached to his headgear; his eyelids were painted red; he had a little hand-drum suspended from his shoulder;—all indicat-

ing that he exercised supreme sacerdotal authority over the community.

Jambavan whispered to Krishna: 'He is the holy man, Samba, the "favourite son" of the Ever-mighty who created the bear-world and protects it for ever and ever. Be respectful to him.'

The bear-king paid his respects to the holy man by crossing his arms and slapping his chest in salutation. In reply, Samba grunted, and by way of blessing, sniffed the king's neck and patted his cheeks with two of his fingers.

As he heard from the bear-king how he came to be accompanied by the two strangers, Samba looked at them with a frown. Krishna could see that, so far as the holy man was concerned, they were not welcome.

They bent low and touched his feet. He forced a smile to his lips and sniffed Krishna's neck. When he tried to do the same to Satyaa, she stepped back, frightened. The smile on Samba's face, as Krishna perceived, turned cruel and malicious.

The king seated himself on the right of Samba and invited Krishna to sit near him.

To the left of the holy man there was seated a stout, middle-aged woman, who made room for Satyaa near her.

While the repast was being prepared, the woman tried to snatch the kitten from Satyaa, to be cooked on the fire. Satyaa rushed to Krishna and handed the kitten to him. The woman also stood up and, vigorously cursing the strangers in her language, came to take away the kitten from Krishna. Uri guessed the woman's intention; she came up to Krishna and mewed for all she was worth.

By a forbidding gesture, Krishna indicated that he would not part with the kitten.

The bear-king saw the mute play between Krishna and the woman, who, Krishna learnt later, was the daughter of the king and the mother of the holy man, and asked her not to take the kitten from Krishna.

When the woman persisted in demanding the kitten, he took it in his own hands, placed it on his lap and began to stroke it. Looking murderously at Krishna, the woman went back to her seat.

After a short while, the kitten, sensing the presence of Uri behind the king, slipped off the king's lap to satisfy its hunger.

Suddenly the bird-notes of the "ghost," who was concealed in the foliage of a nearby tree, were heard. Krishna responded to the music by playing on his flute. Every one seated there was surprised at the musical dialogue between the two.

The holy man interrupted the duet in a loud voice; 'You silly girl, come down. We have had enough of your folly.'

The "ghost" landed, almost floating to the earth, near the holy man. It was a lithe and shapely young woman, dark-skinned, with bright black eyes, a fox-skin girdle round her loins and long hair covering her body.

She approached the holy man and, by way of salutation, folded her hands over her chest and lowered her head. The holy man sniffed her neck and tapped her cheek with two of his fingers. Then she flung herself into the arms of the king, who also sniffed her neck affectionately. 'She is my daughter, Rohini,' he informed Krishna. She turned to Krishna, snatched the flute from his waistband, laughed merrily and returned it to him.

The girl was accosted affectionately by several people who shouted out her name. The vivacious girl came and pressed her hands on the shoulders of her elder sister and found room for herself between her and Satyaa, throwing her right arm around her sister's neck, her left over Satvaa's.

Krishna was surprised to find that the girl could speak in the language of the Aryas, though haltingly like her father.

The meat roasted on the fire was sliced with flints with sharp edges and distributed to all the people pre-

sent amidst a wild babel of the men and women sitting there and the ceaseless grunts of the hungry bears.

The "favourite son of the Ever-mighty" stood up, raised his arm and uttered an invocation: 'Come to us, your people, Ever-mighty, Ever-fearsome, Black God.' Then he played the hand-drum and performed a sort of ritual dance. Every one bowed his head and crossed his arms on his chest. Then the repast began.

When the repast was over, the holy man again stood up, invoked the Black God, played on the drum and took a step or two of the ritualistic dance. Then he shouted: 'Tonight, the Moon-bride will come to your bed, O Ever-mighty. Let your bear-people celebrate the festival.'

Then, with springing steps, he hurried towards the forest, leaving his bear-skin, mask and hand-drum on his seat. Immediately, the young and middle-aged women stood up, adjusted their hair around their bodies and ran after him, shouting with joy, and soon disappearing into the foliage.

Then all the bear-men excepting Jambavan and the old men in the community, ran into the forest. Some of them dashed off in pursuit of the women; some of the women raced after the men delightedly, throwing handfuls of moss at them.

The bears ran after the men and women to participate in the festival.

Krishna placed a supporting hand around the waist of Satyaa, who, unfamiliar with such riotous orgies, was on the point of fainting.

Satyaki sat at a distance, obeying Krishna's wish that his relations with Krishna should remain unknown to the bear-people.

The bird-girl also ran into the forest, but returned after a time to Krishna, knelt before him and, raising her face, slipped a flower behind his ear. Krishna gave her a friendly smile, took the flower from behind his ear and returned it to her.

Unabashed, the bird-girl, Rohini, tried to pull

Krishna by the hand, inviting him to join in what was to her an ordinary festival held every full-moon night, though to him it appeared disgusting. With a smile, he shook her off. She smiled in return, fluttered her eyelids and returned to the forest.

When the full moon had risen, the holy man, Samba, came back, caught hold of Satyaa's hand and began to pull her towards the forest. Satyaa, horrified at his touch, began to scream; there was no mistaking his intentions.

Krishna thrust back the holy man's hand with which he was dragging Satyaa. He did this with such force that the holy man was taken by surprise and lost his balance. He was the religious leader, the "favourite son of the Ever-mighty," held in high veneration by the community. It was inconceivable to him that anyone could have the courage to shake him off rudely or resist him.

Several men and women seated around the community altar or coming out of the forest, hoped to enjoy the sight of the holy man, whose wishes were law in the community, destroying the impertinent stranger.

Satyaki rose from his seat and came up to Krishna to tender him a helping hand, if necessary.

Krishna placed himself between Samba, who had recovered his balance, and Satyaa. Emitting a growl, the holy man furiously rushed at Krishna and, with all the strength in his muscular body, threw both his arms around him, trying to break his ribs like a murderous bear.

Krishna felt that in a few moments the holy man's bear-hug would break his ribs, and he played the death trick, of which he was the master. In spite of the tremendous pressure on his ribs by Samba's arms, Krishna reached out, grasped his hair and pulled his head forward and down. Then he gave a swift blow to the holy man's neck with the edge of his right palm—the palm open, the fingers kept close to one another and rigidly straightened, the thumb giving them stiff sup-

port. It hit the holy man's neck as if it was an axe.

The pressure on Krishna's ribs relaxed. Before the holy man got over his surprise, Krishna swiftly pulled his head up by his hair and hit him again on his throat with the upward thrust of his open palm.

The holy man collapsed to the ground, his neck broken.

THE BLACK GOD'S ORDINANCES

The festival was converted into a grim tragedy.

The bear-people stood transfixed, stunned, horrified. A howl, the like of which the bear-world had never heard, issued from all their throats—a long, loud whine.

They could never have imagined that Samba, the man they stood in awe of, the "favourite son" of the Ever-mighty, endowed as he was with superhuman strength, could be struck down dead in a moment. His collapse could only be the result of the Black God withdrawing his support from his "favourite son" and lending it to the stranger.

Jambavan, the bear-king, stepped up to the dead body of Samba, looking at Krishna with wondering eyes. In the interest of the bear-world, he had supported the sacerdotal authority of Samba and borne with his brutal ways. Now the son of Vasudeva, a stranger, had been sent by the Black God to deliver the community from him.

Immediately he took command of the situation. In a stentorian voice, he invoked the Black God, played the holy man's hand-drum and took a step or two of the ritual dance. All the bear-people immediately bent their heads and crossed their hands on their chests.

When complete silence had prevailed, the bear-king invoked their god: 'May the Ever-mighty, Ever-fearsome, Black God protect us, his bear-people. He has withdrawn his protection from Samba, his "favourite son." It is a situation in which all of us should invoke the Ever-mighty to give us his guidance.'

The crowd shouted: 'May the Ever-mighty, Ever-fearsome, Black God protect us, his people.'

Suddenly the bear-king's elder daughter, the mother of Samba, stepped out of the crowd, crying as if her heart would break, beating her breast and shaking her head in grief. She rushed towards the dead body of her son. It was inauspicious to touch the the dead body of the holy man from whom the Black God had withdrawn his protection. It had to be given up to the bears.

Immediately the elders stepped forward from the crowd and caught hold of her; she struggled in vain to shake them off; overpowered, she fell down to the ground. The elders lifted her and took her away.

Under the orders of the bear-king, five bear-men escorted Krishna, Satyaa and Satyaki to an empty cave.

Then the bear-people sat round the community altar, and after repeated invocations to the Black God, settled down to discussing the unprecedented dilemma.

In spite of the terrible situation in which they were placed, Satyaa was happy. She had wanted Satyaki to bring her to Krishna; he had not been able to. Now she had brought him to Satyaki; it was a miracle.

Left alone in the cave, Krishna embraced Satyaki. 'Satyaki, what endless trouble you have brought me,' said Krishna, slapping his back affectionately.

'Yes, he had to carry me up the mountain, and risk his life to save me from a wicked man,' interrupted Satyaa. She was so glad to be with Satyaki and Krishna that for a moment she recaptured her saucy way of talking.

Then the three of them sat down, close to one another.

'Did they try to kill you?' asked Krishna.

'No,' replied Satyaki. 'But, the bear-king had some motive in kidnapping me. I cannot fathom it. Now death faces all of us, since you have killed their holy man.'

'What do you think they will do to us?' asked Krishna.

'I can't say. These people are frightfully cruel,' replied Satyaki. 'They might hand us over to the bears

or give us as an offering to their Black God. The day I came, one young man who stood up to Samba, was first thrown into the fire, then pulled out when he was half-burnt and given to the bears,' added Satyaki.

'Why does that girl live on the tops of trees and sing like a bird?' asked Krishna.

'Oh, she is the darling of her father, Jambavan. She spends most of her waking time swinging from one tree to another, talking to the monkeys or imitating the notes of the singing birds,' said Satyaki.

'I have a feeling,' said Krishna, 'that she led us here purposely, perhaps at her father's behest.'

Satyaa laughed mischievously. 'Satyaki, the lord was so fascinated with the bird-girl that he followed her to the bear-world. Now she has chosen him as her husband.' She shot a mock-angry glance at Krishna.

Krishna replied to her remark only by a smile and asked Satyaki: 'Do you know where *Syamantaka* is?'

'No,' replied Satyaki.

'I am sure it is here,' said Krishna. 'I recovered one piece of the gold chain from which it was suspended, at the place where Prasena was killed; another piece I found in the upper cave which leads to the bear-world. Jambavan must have brought the jewel here. I was confirmed in my view when I realised that the piece of bear-skin in the dead lion's paw was taken from the shoulder of the king's bear-nephew.'

'What is going to happen to us?' asked Satyaki.

'We need not be surprised if we are all thrown to the king's favourite bear-nephew. He can never have tasted sweeter flesh than Satyaa's,' Krishna said and laughed.

'I am glad that all three of us will be together in his stomach,' interrupted Satyaa with a smile and added: 'unless the bird-girl kidnaps you, lord.' Her eyes were dancing merrily at the pleasurable prospect of keeping Krishna company in the stomach of the bear.

'Anyway we would be rid of Uri and her kitten,' said Krishna, as he saw Uri coming into the cave

regardless of the guards. The kitten followed her proudly, sniffed at each one of them and snuggled close to Krishna.

They laid themselves down on beds of green leaves. In spite of the hectic day that they had spent and the vociferous discussions of the community of the bear-people far into the night, sleep overcame them.

When dawn broke, Krishna was awakened by the notes of the bird-girl.

He responded to her by playing notes of music on his flute. They were challenging each other.

When the sun rose, the guards rolled away the stone which they had placed at the mouth of the cave.

Krishna and his companions were then taken by the guards to the stream, in which they had their bathe and performed their morning ritual. On their way back, they saw several bear-men sitting in ankle-deep water in the stream and washing the sand again and again till particles of gold were left in their hands.

Satyaa saw what they were doing and turned to Krishna: 'Lord, some of the grains of gold which we saw lying scattered in the sacred cave were from the stream here.'

Krishna nodded assent. 'Yes, Satyaa. The gold which your father claimed to have received from *Sya-mantaka* must have been given him by the bear-people. Evidently, gold has no value for the bear-women; they are very much wiser than you who will defy *Dharma* a hundred times to get gold.'

When they had returned to their cave, the guards brought food for them.

At midday, one of the elders came to invite Satyaki.

'Go by all means, but don't lose your temper. Do not be ruffled even if they are rude,' Krishna told Satyaki. 'Remember, Satyaki, we are in a delicate position. Speak as little as you can and do not take any initiative. We don't know where we are with these people. I have a feeling that the bear-king is a friend.'

In the afternoon, Krishna and Satyaa were also

taken to the bear-king, who sat with dignity on a stone seat in front of his cave. The hand-drum and the two bear-tails which had been fastened to the holy man's headgear—the insignia of his sacerdotal authority—lay in front of him.

Six bear-men, all with white beards and wrinkled skin, sat on the ground near him, three on each side. Satyaki was seated in front of the king with the bear-nephew behind him. Several bear-men and women were sitting at some distance from them, interested to see what was going to happen in this completely novel situation.

Krishna and Satyaa folded their hands and touched Jambavan's feet in salutation.

Jambavan, by a gesture, asked them to sit near Satyaki, which they did.

Menakaa, the kitten, climbed on to Satyaa's lap, sat for a moment or two, then restlessly climbed down and went on a spree of its own, sniffing at the persons sitting there and slowly approaching its friend, the bear-nephew.

'Son of Vasudeva, you said that you came here to pay your respects to me,' said the bear-king.

Krishna said: 'Noble king, you are right. And also, with your permission, to take my friend Satyaki back with us.' His tone was so very friendly that the bear-king found it hard to maintain the conversation at a formal level.

The king asked Krishna questions in the language of the Aryas, which he spoke in a halting way, and then rendered the questions and answers to the other elders in their language.

'Son of Vasudeva, you told me that you wished to take *Syamantaka* back with you. Why do you say that it is here?' asked the bear-king.

'I know it is,' said Krishna. 'And you know that I know it,' he added with a disarming smile.

'How do I know that you have not been sent by Satrajit?' asked the bear-king.

‘Ask this young woman. She is his daughter,’ said Krishna.

‘Did he send you here?’ asked the bear-king, turning to Satyaa.

‘No,’ replied Satyaa. ‘My father sent his brother with the jewel so that it could be kept in the sacred cave. Then he charged the noble son of Vasudeva,’ she said, pointing to Krishna, ‘with having stolen the jewel. The lord took a vow before our king that he would find the jewel to disprove the charge of theft. He also pledged himself to court death if he did not. I felt that the jewel must have been sent to the sacred cave by my father. So, without the knowledge of either my father or the noble son of Vasudeva, I induced Satyaki to come with me in search of the jewel to save the lord’s life. The noble son of Vasudeva also came in search of us and the jewel. His very life depends upon his taking back *Syamantaka*.’

The bear-king turned to Krishna and said: ‘Your friend here has told us that you are a living god.’

‘It is very generous of him to say so,’ said Krishna and laughed as if amused. ‘I know what I am.’

‘How did you kill our holy man Samba?’ asked the bear-king.

‘You saw how I did it.’

‘But Samba was under the protection of the Ever-mighty.’ Jambavan was still unable to reconcile himself to the idea that Samba, the “favourite son” of the Ever-mighty, could have forfeited the goodwill of his god.

Krishna smiled. ‘Your god, it appears, withdrew his protection from the holy man. He also gave me strength because Samba was doing a very sinful thing.’

‘A sinful thing!’ exclaimed the bear-king.

Krishna replied: ‘The man who forces himself on a woman against her will commits a heinous sin and deserves death. When I stopped him from doing so, he wanted to kill me with a powerful bear-hug.’

‘Son of Vasudeva, we all invoked the Ever-mighty last night. He wants you to stay with us here and be

his "favourite son",' said the bear-king.

'If the Ever-mighty has suggested that I be your holy man, I would like to speak to him,' said Krishna.

The bear-king looked at the high peak under the shadow of which the bear-people lived. 'Don't insult him. He is all-powerful. If you disobey him, he will strike you dead.'

'Noble king, I did not mean to offend you or the Ever-mighty,' said Krishna in an apologetic tone. 'I honour him. All the gods lead to one Great God, if we invoke them with devotion.'

Not being able to understand Krishna's affirmation, the bear-king said: 'Then obey his injunctions. No stranger who comes to the bear-world can go back. That is why Satrajit was only able to come up to the sacred cave and did not dare set foot in the bear-world.'

'How can I remain here? All my people—my parents, my wives, my children, my friends—are all in Dwaraka, waiting for my return. There is a wider world which you do not know of, which also needs me,' said Krishna.

'There is no greater world than the bear-world,' said the bear-king sternly. 'Our need has to be satisfied first.'

'That is why I wanted to talk to your Ever-mighty personally,' said Krishna in a very earnest tone. 'Noble king, do you understand why I want to talk to him? I would pray to him to give you strength and make you his "favourite son." You are the fittest person to be so. You understand your people's needs as no one else does; you are old, experienced and wise; you have faith in your god and the goodwill of your people. I am sure, if you put my prayer to your god, he will approve of it.'

The bear-king translated the reply in his language to the elders. Immediately there was a change in their attitude; they began to look at Krishna with a new respect.

'No, no. That is out of the question,' replied the bear-king. 'The Ever-mighty has willed you should

be his "favourite son".'

'I am not fit to be your holy man,' said Krishna with a modest air.

'It is blasphemy that you are talking,' said the bear-king though he was shaken by the way Krishna was speaking about himself.

'Noble king, my prayer is not blasphemy,' said Krishna. 'Kindly convey my earnest and sincere prayer to your Ever-mighty in these words:

"Thou, Ever-mighty, Ever-fearsome, Black God, withhold Thy fearsome aspect from Thy bear-people. Show them mercy; give them Thy love; arm them with the strength which flows from the devotion offered to Thee. Hear my prayer, Thou Ever-mighty: Rid the bear-people of fear; teach them the way of righteousness; lead them to happiness and vigour; give them many sons with long years of life; give Thy people a 'favourite son' who makes them feel at one with Thee."

Krishna's voice was vibrant with humility.

The bear-king translated what he said to the elders, who heard it with wide-eyed attention.

Krishna continued: 'Noble king, if this prayer of the bear-people reaches the Ever-mighty, he is sure to bless us all.'

'It is no use discussing the mandate of the Ever-mighty. For the present you will have to live among us till the Ever-mighty commands otherwise.'

'Have I anything more to do?' asked Krishna.

'Yes. According to the eternal law of the Ever-mighty, you have to accept my daughter, Rohini, as your wife, now that you have killed Samba, to whom she was pledged at her birth,' said the bear-king.

'But I do not want to marry Rohini.'

'Our law is immutable,' said the bear-king. The man who kills another has to accept his wife.'

'And if I don't?' asked Krishna.

'She will have to be offered to the Ever-mighty at the community altar.'

'Why would you be so cruel?' asked Krishna.

'There is no choice left to you or to Rohini. If

you do not accept her, she will have to be offered to the Ever-mighty.'

'Let me think. I will give you a reply tomorrow,' said Krishna.

'Yes, son of Vasudeva. Tomorrow at midday you can tell us whether you accept the ordinances of the Ever-mighty.'

The elders nodded assent and invoked the protection of the Black God.

The bear-king got up and went into his cave. The bear-nephew followed him. The kitten also thought it great fun to accompany the bear. The bear-king was amused, picked it up and tucked it under his arm.

The elders also left.

Krishna's eyes were inscrutable. Satyaki felt dazed, Satyaa was on the point of fainting.

ROHINI WANTS TO ENTER THE FIRE

When the bear-king and the elders left the place, the bear-people dispersed. Some of them, however, looked back and cast a malevolent glance at the three strangers.

Krishna and his companions were left free only in name, for the guards with their bears stood at a little distance, ready to follow them wherever they went.

Krishna and his companions left the spot when Satyaa recovered consciousness. She dragged herself along, supported by Krishna.

As if circling the plateau, they took the path leading to the tunnel through which they had come, only to find that several bear-men with their bears had camped in front of its mouth.

When they were on their way back to their cave, they stood on the edge of the plateau overhanging the valley. Krishna's eyes swept the mountain-side in search of a way-out.

'There is no way out of this plateau except through the sacred cave, but that is now barred,' said Satyaki, guessing what Krishna was thinking of. 'In spite of his apparent friendliness, Jambavan has taken all precautions against our escaping from here.'

Satyaki continued: 'When you are installed as holy man and married to Rohini, their suspicion will be allayed. Then we can escape by the sacred cave.'

'We may not be alive by then,' said Krishna. 'If we cannot go by way of the sacred cave, we will climb up there and find a way to the valley,' added Krishna, pointing to the peak.

'But that is where the terrible Black God lives.

'We dare not go that way,' said Satyaa.

'Well,' replied Krishna. 'If we have to escape that way, we will have to face the Black God, however terrible he may be.'

'Could there be a path to go down to the valley from there?' asked Satyaki.

'There must be, or we shall make one,' said Krishna. 'Let us go to our cave and take rest, for we may have stormy days ahead of us,' he added, his eyes looking at the peak.

As the sun was setting, they heard Rohini's bird-notes which had a joyous ring. Krishna guessed that she had heard the conversation between him and her father and was inviting him to accept her. He took his flute and played a harsh, angry note. Rohini responded by a piteous one, which was cut short abruptly.

As she lay down to sleep, tears continued to well up in Satyaa's eyes. The three of them would be offered to the Black God; that would be the end of all her dreams. She had tried to be a hero's wife, but in the strange predicament in which they were placed there was no scope for heroism.

Uri sat near Satyaa; she knew that her mistress was unhappy. Mini, the kitten, walked up to Krishna and lay on the ground near him.

'Mini is madly in love with you, lord,' said Satyaa.

'I wish all of you were like Mini. See how it comes to sleep near me, never worrying what its fate will be the next moment,' said Krishna, trying to dispel the gloom in which Satyaa and Satyaki were enveloped. He lifted Mini by its loose skin and flung it to Satyaa. She caught it and placed it near her. It immediately began to purr, slowly sniffed its way back to Krishna and lay down near him.

'Didn't I tell you,' asked Krishna, 'that it has passed on all its worries to me and is going to sleep happily?' Everyone laughed.

'Lord, you want us to be like Mini—all of us?' asked Satyaa. 'Then you will do nothing but rub our backs.'

'Try, if you can,' said Krishna and laughed. Then he added: 'Now go to sleep.'

In the morning they had a bathe in the stream and performed the ritual. On their return to the cave, they held a council of war.

Satyaa was making a superhuman effort to be a hero's wife. Anyhow the lord should live; his life now hung on his accepting Rohini as a wife. Ultimately she summoned up courage to say: 'Lord, listen to me for a moment. It is true, as you said last night, that I have not the devotion of Mini.' She could not help replying to Krishna's remark of the previous night about the kitten's devotion to him. 'We all offer you whatever we can. But, once in a while you must listen to our requests. You must accept the king's decision.'

'I know, Satyaa, that if I don't accept his decision, all of us will be thrown to the monster, whatever it is,' said Krishna in a very affectionate tone, conveying his appreciation of her devotion.

'If you decline to marry Rohini, they will throw her into the fire,' said Satyaa, looking down with her head bent to conceal the anguish which was reflected in her face. In a trembling voice, she added: 'And if you marry the king's daughter, they will never kill you.'

'Listen, Satyaki,' said Krishna. 'Both of you and I are pledged to bring back *Syamantaka* to Dwaraka. We have to take it with us or perish in the attempt, Black God or no Black God.'

'How will you do it, lord?' asked Satyaki.

'I don't see the light yet,' said Krishna. 'I will see it when the situation develops tomorrow.'

For a long time they sat silently. Then Krishna said decisively: 'I am very clear in my mind: if we go back at all, it will be the three of us and with *Syamantaka*.'

One of the elders who had been with the bearing the previous day, came to invite them to the royal cave.

'Put on a happy face, both of you,' said Krishna. 'Don't look miserable. And Satyaa, don't shed tears or go into hysterics or faint, whatever happens,' added Krishna. 'We are all one now, including this wretched cat of yours and its nasty kitten which does not leave me for a moment.' He handed Mini to Satyaa.

When they reached the royal cave, the bear-king was seated on his stone seat, his look stern and unforgiving, very different from the kindly one with which he had talked to Krishna the day he met him first. The six elders were with him. Most of the bear-people squatted at a little distance in a semicircle.

The bear-king asked them to sit down, which they did after offering salutations.

For a time the bear-king closed his eyes. Every one silently gazed at him. Then he began to shake his head as if he was possessed by the Black God; he was making a tremendous effort to come to an ugly decision. Then he opened his eyes, which had grown red, and fixed his gaze on Krishna.

He spoke as if in a trance: 'Stranger, have you understood the immutable commands of the Ever-mighty?'

Krishna could not fathom the change of mood that had overtaken the bear-king, but with a sweet smile, he replied: 'Yes, noble king.'

The bear-king translated his question and Krishna's answer into their tongue, so that the people might understand.

'You have killed Samba, our holy man. You have, therefore, to be proclaimed holy man,' said the bear-king as if laying down the law. 'Then, three days hence, we will take you to the Ever-mighty, Ever-fearsome, Black God. You can offer worship to him. If he approves of you, you will be accepted as his favourite son. Do you understand?'

'I do,' replied Krishna in an equally decisive manner.

'You accept the commands of the Ever-mighty?'

'Yes,' replied Krishna.

‘Having killed Samba, you have to make Rohini your wife; that is the Ever-mighty’s ordinance,’ said the bear-king in a low, reverential tone.

‘But is she willing? Have you ascertained what she has to say about it?’ asked Krishna.

‘She has no choice. The ordinances of the Ever-mighty are explicit,’ said the bear-king. His voice showed that he was maintaining a detached attitude with great difficulty. ‘If you don’t marry her, she will be sacrificed at the altar this evening,’ he added, pointing to the community altar.

Satyaa suppressed a sob.

‘What about *Syamantaka*?’ asked Krishna.

‘We are the guardians of the magic jewel. It belonged in our sacred cave. Satrajit took it, because his god, Surya, gave it to him. When he carried it away, he pledged that he would worship it every time the Moon-bride came to the bed of the Ever-mighty. We shall seek the guidance of the Ever-mighty as to what we should do about it,’ said the bear-king.

The bear-king and his advisers discussed the matter in their own language for some time.

‘Now you can go to your cave,’ commanded the bear-king. ‘We shall meet at the altar in the afternoon. The ordinances will be fulfilled in the evening.’

Krishna and his companions went back to their cave in grim anxiety.

Soon after the sun had passed the meridian, the community gathered at the altar and Jambavan sent for Krishna and his companions.

When they came to the community altar, they were invited to join the community at their meal and partook of their broth. The bear-people chattered and shouted to their hearts’ content—all except the bear-king who remained stern and silent.

Then, at the command of the bear-king, four bear-men brought a big bear’s skin with its head still attached to it, which the holy man Samba had worn before, and ceremoniously dressed Krishna in it.

The ceremonies began; the women burst into song in a raucous voice; the men invoked the Ever-mighty.

The bear-king then applied the ashes from the altar to Krishna's face and made an invocation: 'Ever-mighty, Ever-fearsome, Black God, protect us, your bear-people. Please accept the son of Vasudeva as your favourite son. The bear-people will present him to you on the fourth day for your approval.'

Krishna could not help shuddering while his face was besmeared with the ashes from the altar on which animals were roasted and men had been burnt.

The bear-king then placed a necklace of bears' teeth round Krishna's neck amidst the joyous shouts of the community.

'Swear by the Ever-mighty, Ever-fearsome, Black God that you will obey his commands.' The bear-king pronounced the formula.

After Krishna had repeated the formula in token of acceptance, the bear-king invited Krishna to sit on the seat of the holy man. Then he issued orders, in response to which four bear-women brought the bird-girl, dressed from head to foot in a bear-skin. She came forward hesitantly, unwillingly, shuddering at the fate which awaited her.

The bear-king stood up, chanted a benediction and requested Krishna to stand. Then he spoke: 'Holy man of the bear-world, chosen as the favourite son of the Ever-mighty, Ever-fearsome, Black God, do you accept this young woman, Rohini, the daughter of Jambavan, as your wife?'

'I am the holy man, as you say,' Krishna replied. 'I have decided that she shall not be married to me.'

The bear-king was angry, his eyes were threatening. 'The holy man does not decide anything till he is confirmed by the Ever-mighty,' he said. His voice was firm and irresistible. 'His ordinances declare that a man who kills another has to marry the woman to whom the dead man was pledged. No one has dared to defy them. If you refuse to marry Rohini, pledged at birth to Samba whom you have killed, she

as his unprofitable limb will have to be offered to the Ever-mighty at this altar here and now.'

The ultimatum was received with vociferous shouts from the bear-people gathered there. 'May the Ever-mighty, Ever-fearsome, Black God protect his bear-people.'

After silence was restored, Krishna said: 'I don't want to depart from the ordinances of the Ever-mighty, but he would not sanction a marriage of which I disapprove and of which she also disapproves.'

Jambavan raised his hand and invoked the Ever-mighty to give his commands. All the others joined in the invocation.

Then the bear-king turned to Krishna and put it to him sternly: 'I ask you once and for all: Do you accept this young woman or must she be offered as a sacrifice to the Ever-mighty, Ever-fearsome, Black God at the sacred altar?'

Krishna looked at the bird-girl. Her girlish face was woebegone. Her eyes reflected terror. As she furtively looked at the fire on the altar, tears streamed down her cheeks.

The bear-men continued to howl: 'Throw her to the fire, throw her to the fire.'

After quiet had been restored, the bear-king demanded of Krishna: 'Holy man, what is your decision? Will you marry this girl, the daughter of Jambavan, or not?'

Rohini, overpowered with terror, would have fallen to the ground, had not the women surrounding her held her. An elderly woman hit her on the back to prevent her from fainting.

Satyaa gave Rohini the broth in a clay vessel, which she took.

When she saw who was giving her the drink, the bird-girl pathetically muttered: 'You are so good, stranger,' and clung to Satyaa, sobbing.

When she had revived a little, Rohini said to her father in a voice choking with fright: 'Father, please consign me to the sacred altar. I don't want

to marry this stranger.' She looked piteously at her father.

Krishna saw how the young woman—almost a girl—felt. She was not willing to marry him. He had rejected her offer on the festival day; she also knew that he was forced to accept her as his wife.

'What!' shouted the bear-king in a threatening voice.

In spite of being in great distress, her voice choking and lips trembling, Rohini said: 'I want to enter the fire,' and moved towards the altar.

ROHINI'S WEDDING

Krishna saw Rohini's heart-breaking distress, caught hold of her hand and stopped her from proceeding further. 'No, bird-girl, I am going to marry you; I am going to marry you,' he said like a loving mother assuring her child.

She shook her head and tried to shake off Krishna's hand. 'No, no,' she replied in broken accents. 'If you wed me, you will be very unhappy. I am not fit to be your wife,' she muttered.

Krishna looked into her tearful, terrified eyes and placed a hand on her shoulder with loving tenderness. 'Bird-girl, why are you afraid to be my wife?' he asked. 'I won't be unhappy.'

All the bear-people collected around them, waiting expectantly for the outcome of this conversation, most of which they did not understand. They enjoyed the situation; someone or other would be offered to the Black God, always an exciting event.

For some time, Rohini looked down and did not answer. Then she glanced up at Krishna with her eyes full of misery, broke into sobs and would have fallen to the ground, had not Satyaa supported her.

'Father, consign me to the altar,' she entreated her father incoherently, sobbing convulsively.

Krishna turned to the bear-king and spoke in the language of the Aryas: 'Translate to her in your language what I say. I want her to understand every word I say.'

The bear-king nodded assent.

'I want to marry you, I want you to be my wife,' said Krishna in an appealing way as if he was asking for a favour. Rohini, in spite of her distress, looked

hopefully at Krishna. 'Noble king, continue with the ceremony. I want to marry her,' he said to the bear-king.

'I ask you, Rohini, daughter of Jambavan,' said the bear-king, 'whether you swear by the Ever-mighty, Ever-fearsome, Black God that you will marry the son of Vasudeva.'

'Please put it to her again,' said Krishna. 'Bird-girl, I want to marry you. Your father also wants you to marry me.'

The bear-king asked Krishna to put to Rohini the ceremonial question: 'Do you promise to leave your sire's home and be my wife?'

In spite of her limited command of the language of the Aryas, Rohini said in a trembling voice: 'Stranger, you don't have to marry me. Some day you will go away and I will be without you. If you take me to your people, you will be sorry to have taken me.'

Satyaa, moved to tears by the way in which Rohini was speaking, told her: 'Rohini, say "I promise".'

Krishna looked at Rohini assuringly. 'Wherever I am, there you shall be, bird-girl. Do you promise to be my wife?'

'I promise,' muttered the bird-girl, lowering her head.

'Stranger, son of Vasudeva,' said the bear-king, 'tell her that you will look after her.'

'Yes, bird girl, I will look after you,' said Krishna.

The bear-king again uttered another formula to Krishna, which he repeated: 'May the Ever-mighty, Ever-fearsome, Black God, and Yama, the dread God of Death, strike me dead if I abandon you.'

The bear-king turned to Rohini. 'Repeat: "I, Rohini, swear by the Ever-mighty, Ever-fearsome, Black God that wherever you are, there will I be. Whatever you command, I will do".'

Rohini raised her beautiful little face to Krishna. 'Stranger, think again. You don't have to marry me.' Tears were rolling down her cheeks.

'But I want to marry you,' said Krishna in a clear, earnest voice.

Rohini hesitantly repeated the formula: 'Wherever you are, there will I be. Whatever you command, I will do.'

'You are now husband and wife,' said the bear-king and applied ashes to the faces of both of them muttering a formula prescribed by ritual. Then he ordered some bear-men and women: 'Take them to the nuptial cave made ready for them.'

The men lifted Krishna and the women lifted Rohini, and they proceeded to the nuptial cave, followed by the whole community singing joyful songs.

After the crowd had dispersed, Krishna and Rohini were left alone in the nuptial cave. She could no longer stand and sat leaning against the wall with her hands to her forehead, crying all the time.

As the moon rose, the nuptial cave was lit by a sort of twilight. Krishna removed the bear-skins in which he and Rohini were wrapped, sat down by her and in a soothing way, said: 'Bird-girl, don't be unhappy. I will look after you and make you happy wherever we are.'

Rohini could not control herself. She buried her face in her hands and whimpered like a helpless child. Krishna allowed her to cry so that the burden of distress might be lifted from her. In a choking voice, she said: 'Son of Vasudeva, I don't want to live. I will fling myself down into the valley.'

'Why should you?' asked Krishna as he placed a hand on her shoulder.

In broken accents, she replied: 'I have no mother, no brother, no sister of my own. My step-sister, Samba's mother, hates me more than anyone else. My father, who loved me, has ceased to do so: he wanted to throw me into the fire—so hard-hearted has he become. Why did my mother not take me away with her when she went to the abode of the Black God?'

Krishna took her in his arms. 'But I am here. I

will look after you better than your father and mother would.'

Rohini burst into sobs.

'Don't worry, Jambavati,' said Krishna. Then he flashed his sweet smile at her. 'You don't know what a family you have now entered. My parents will love you more than yours have done.'

Then, with a chuckle, he added: 'You will be surprised to see my elder brother and his wife, who are as tall as this peak. They will be delighted to have you with them. My wives will accept you as their sister. Satyaki, my friend, will be a loving brother to you. Satyaa—the woman with the cat, as you call her—has already fallen in love with you. My younger sister, who is of your age, will just dote on you. I have a cousin, Uddhava, who has a doll-like pair of twins as his wives. The children will love learning your way of swaying from tree to tree and will not rest content till you have taught them all the bird-songs. You will never miss your mother or father.'

Rohini could never have conceived that there could be a loving family of this kind. She was fascinated by what Krishna told her. She wiped her tears and with a faint smile, looked at him with confidence.

'But you will never reach your place, lord,' she said. 'You don't know how bloodthirsty my people are. They will not rest content till they have thrown all three of you to the Black God.'

'They will do nothing of the kind,' said Krishna in an assuring tone.

'You don't know, they will simply kill you,' said Rohini.

'Now, listen, Jambavati. The God of Death runs away when he meets his elder brother; a Kshatriya, and I am one. Don't worry about me.'

'I cannot forget my wickedness. It is I who lured you to the bear-world and you are so good and generous,' said Rohini.

'Were you asked to bring us here?' asked Krishna. When she nodded her head in assent, he again asked

her: 'Who asked you to bring us here?'

'My father.'

'What did he tell you to do?'

'Some days ago, he had a dream that the magic jewel, *Syamantaka*, would come to him. He has always felt that when he gets it, luck will turn in our favour. He asked me to find out whether Satrajit had come to the sacred cave so that he, father, could worship the magic jewel.'

'What did he do after that?'

'Prompted by the dream, he went in search of Satrajit, but found the jewel in the mouth of a lion. He set on the bear-nephew to kill him.'

'But the bear-nephew is so friendly!'

'Only in our land. Oh, he is so terrible when he is asked to kill a man or a beast!'

'Father brought the jewel here,' she continued. 'He assured me that the luck—whatever it might be—was turning in our favour.'

'What happened the next day?'

Rohini continued: 'The next day he brought your friend here. Again he asked me to go to the sacred cave. When I went there, I found you and the woman with the cat. I informed father about it and he asked me to bring you here.' Then she broke down and added: 'I invited you to your deaths.'

'But we are not going to die, I assure you,' said Krishna. 'We will find a way to get out of this land.'

Rohini was disconsolate and shook her head in distress. 'You don't know what happened the night you killed Samba, our holy man. Our people wanted to throw you and your friend and the woman with the cat into the fire straight away. Father would not agree. He said that, according to the ordinances of the Black God, you, who killed Samba, must be first chosen as the holy man and I should be married to you. They agreed not to throw you into the fire immediately, as father gave a promise that if, after becoming the "favourite son" of the Black God, you did not marry me, he would offer me on the community altar.'

Krishna was surprised at what Rohini told him. 'Jambavati, I have now married you. So his promise is kept. We are now safe, aren't we?'

'No, noble son of Vasudeva. After three days, they will take you to the Ever-mighty and offer you to him,' said Rohini.

'But who is this Black God? Why are you all afraid of him?'

'He is terrible. Anyone who looks at him dies on the spot, except his "favourite son." He is very bloodthirsty, noble son of Vasudeva,' said Rohini and shuddered.

Krishna thought that she was again on the point of bursting into tears and diverted the conversation. 'Now stop calling me "son of Vasudeva." Call me "lord" as Satyaki and the woman with the cat call me. Or you can invent any other name that you like, but don't cry.'

'Oh, it is coming!' said Rohini and pointed to the mouth of the cave. In came Mini, the kitten, snuffing its way, and went straight to Krishna and tried to climb on to his lap.

'It must have taken endless trouble to find me out here,' said Krishna. As he stroked its back, Mini purred.

Krishna wanted to prevent despair overcoming Rohini again. He put his arm around her. 'Now, tell me your secret, Jambavati. Why do you live in trees, racing with monkeys and singing like a bird?'

'My mother, from her childhood, felt unhappy at our bloodthirsty bear-men and bear-women observing cruel ordinances. To escape their company, she climbed the trees and made friends with the monkeys and birds. She understood them and they understood her. So she began to live in the foliage of the trees for the best part of the day, coming to Father's cave only at night.'

'How did your father take it?'

'Father was always indulgent to my mother as well as to me,' replied Rohini.

'I also thought him so. He received me in a very friendly spirit,' replied Krishna. 'I don't know why he took a stern attitude after I killed Samba, whom I thought he hated. But did he allow your mother to do what she liked?'

'Oh, yes,' replied Rohini. 'After I was a few months old, she tied her long hair into a sort of cradle and carried me on her back when she climbed the trees. We were so happy spending our days in the trees, for the monkeys and the birds loved us. She taught me how to talk to them in their own language.'

'But why were you pledged to Samba at your birth?'

'That is prescribed by our ordinances,' said Rohini and paused a little. Then she resumed: 'I shuddered at the prospect of being married to Samba, and father arranged that our wedding should take place after I reached womanhood. I hated the cruel man, so malicious, so vindictive towards all those who crossed his path.'

'I still wonder why your father bore with such a man. Did your father ever tell you why he wanted to lure us here?'

'I don't know. But I think he did it because he felt that *Syamantaka* would bring luck to us through you.'

'I cannot understand why he now insists on my being the holy man and on your being married to me.'

'I could see that he admired you very much when he first met you,' said Rohini. 'He told me that you are a living god, according to your friend, Satyaki.'

'But what changed him so completely?'

'When you killed Samba, he became hard-hearted and enforced the ordinances.'

'Let us forget everything and go to sleep, Jambavati; it is very late. We have to conserve our strength for the coming three days,' said Krishna and drew her to himself. Then he added: 'We are going to get out from here. Now, see, the kitten has already gone to sleep by my side.'

The moon had risen higher. Moonlight now poured into the cave at the mouth.

Krishna woke up with a start. As the mouth of the cave faced the west, the moonlight now lit it up. Mini, sensing some danger, mewed angrily; it had inherited its mother's gift.

Footsteps could be heard approaching stealthily towards the mouth of the cave. Krishna got up and stood at the mouth of the cave, ready to deal with any intruder.

He heard a whispered query: 'Son of Vasudeva, are you awake?'

THE MAGIC OF SYAMANTAKA

Krishna was surprised. There was no mistaking the voice—it was that of the bear-king, but it was not harsh as it had been for the last two days; it was redolent with affection.

The bear-king came into the cave; his bear-nephew settled down outside. Mini ran to play with its huge friend.

‘You are welcome, noble king,’ said Krishna heartily and added with a smile: ‘Particularly when you are not upholding the ordinances of your Ever-mighty.’

Rohini woke up and, seeing her father talking to Krishna in a friendly way, came and sat near Krishna.

‘Rohini, are you happy, my child?’ asked the bear-king, lowering his voice. It was clear that he had come in stealth.

‘The son of Vasudeva—the lord—has taken me under his care,’ replied Rohini. ‘Don’t worry about me.’

‘Rohini, I don’t know for how many days the son of Vasudeva can look after you,’ said the bear-king and turned to Krishna. ‘Do you know what fate awaits you?’

‘I know it,’ said Krishna. ‘After three days you will take me to the Black God and offer me to him. Then Rohini will be married to the next man who will be ordained the “favourite son”.’

‘There is some truth in what your friend told me about your being a living god. You seem to know everything,’ said the bear-king as if in a bantering tone.

Krishna interrupted: ‘Unless you become the “favourite son,” as I suggested.’

'First, I must dispose of you before I can think of myself,' said the bear-king, laughing aloud. 'Do you know, son of Vasudeva, that I asked Rohini to lure you to the bear-world?'

'Do I know it?' said Krishna, keeping up the banter. 'Your daughter has already betrayed your secret; she has told me everything about your tricks.'

'Do you know why?'

'Yes. Out of your kindness,' replied Krishna with his most charming smile.

'No,' grunted the bear-king. 'It was from a selfish motive. I wanted you to marry Rohini.'

Krishna laughed. 'Your ways, noble king, are strange. Why do you get her to marry me, so as to make her a widow?'

'Because I had waited for you for endless Moon bridal nights.'

'Waited for me!' exclaimed Krishna.

'Yes. I will tell you how,' said the bear-king. 'Rohini's mother wanted me to escape with her from the bear-world and its cruel ways. She could not stand them.'

'Why didn't you escape then?' asked Krishna.

'I never thought that there was any other world but ours till Satrajit came first to the sacred cave to worship his god, and received the magic jewel which brings luck. He told me about your great world outside, of all the different kinds of men and animals—handsome men and women, who eat and drink as they like, and the strange animals on which they ride. He promised me to help us to escape to that world.'

'Did he help you?' asked Krishna.

'No. He was a wicked man,' said the bear-king. 'He promised to help me to escape if I brought the shining yellow sand from our river as an act of worship to the magic jewel on every moon bridal night.'

'I can now understand,' said Krishna, 'why on every full-moon night you gave him the yellow shining particles so that he might worship *Syamantaka*.'

‘Yes.’

‘What happened then? Why didn’t he help you?’

The king’s eyes grew moist. ‘Rohini’s mother—so wonderful, so sweet, so vivacious—died.’ He shook his head dolefully and wiped away a tear with his finger.

Then he continued: ‘Rohini was a child then. The bear-people also needed my protection, as Samba was becoming more vindictive and cruel day by day.’

The king paused. ‘Rohini took after her mother; she hated the ways of the bear-world and began to live in the trees during the day, making friends with the monkeys, squirrels and birds. I wanted her to escape from the world to which I was tied. But she could only escape the bear-world if she found a suitable husband from your world. I even learnt the way you speak and taught it to Rohini, preparing her for her life in your world,’ said the king.

‘What did you mean to do?’ asked Krishna.

‘Satrajit told me that if every month on the Moon bridal night I helped him to worship the magic jewel with the shining yellow sand from our river, he would bring his son, so that Rohini could be wedded to him. But he said that he would only do so when Rohini grew into a woman.’

‘How long did you live in that hope?’

‘When she grew, I reminded Satrajit again and again to fulfil his promise, but he would not. Then I realised that his promises were all false. He was only interested in having the yellow sand from us, which he seemed to prize above everything. Sometimes I was inclined to set my bear-nephew on him, but if I did that, all hopes of my saving Rohini would have gone.’

‘How did you come across my friend Satyaki?’ asked Krishna.

‘Some days ago, I had a dream that the magic jewel was coming to me to bring good luck to Rohini. So my bear-nephew and I went in search of the magic jewel. My dream proved true: I found it hanging by a chain from the mouth of a lion. I asked my bear-nephew to

kill the lion, which he did.' The king looked back affectionately at the bear-nephew playing with Mini near the mouth of the cave and added: 'He is a very affectionate and loyal bear. But when his blood is up, he is very ferocious.'

'You did not meet my friend on that day?' asked Krishna.

'No,' replied the king. 'When the magic jewel came to my hands, I felt sure that it would bring good luck to Rohini. So the next day we went in search of the person who was to bring her luck. I found your friend.'

'How did you know that we had come to the sacred cave?'

'Your friend told me that we should go in search of the woman with the cat. So I sent Rohini to the upper cave to see whether anyone had come there. She brought me the news that the woman with the cat and you were there. I asked her to lure you to the bear-world. I felt sure that the magic jewel would enable Rohini to leave this bear-world.'

'Why didn't you tell me so?' asked Krishna.

'Before I could tell you anything, you had killed Samba and invited the curse of the Black God on yourself.'

'What is the use of talking about luck?' asked Krishna. 'After three days I will be offered to your Black God, and I am sure Rohini—like an Arya wife—now that she is married to me—will die after me rather than marry another holy man; isn't that so?' he asked Rohini.

'Yes, lord,' replied Rohini decisively. 'I am not going to marry the next "favourite son".'

'But you were so stern when I met you the next day,' said Krishna.

'With my people sitting there, I could not show how happy I was when you talked about love, mercy and grace, things of which we know nothing. I saw that my Rohini would be happy with you. But now let us not waste time. You, with Rohini and your

friends, have to escape from here.'

Krishna was surprised at the suggestion. 'But you have closed the way to the sacred cave,' he remarked.

'I had to do that. My people were very insistent. They have filled the cave with stones so that no one can come or go through it.'

'Did you say "escape"?''

'I said "escape",' replied the king.

'But how?' asked Krishna.

'The only way to escape is to go to the top of the peak by the trail which runs along the river. If the Black God lets you pass, you can go to the other side of the peak and descend to the valley. There is a bear-trail which takes you to the valley, but it is very dangerous.' The king rose to leave.

'It is noble of you to have thought of our welfare, great king. Rest assured that Rohini will be very happy with me.' Krishna and Rohini also stood up.

'It is getting rather late. Go away now. Take the trail as soon as you can, and trust to your luck.'

'When will you let us go?'

'This very moment. My people are lying asleep around the community altar. Tomorrow their mood may change when the effect of the brew is over; they may throw you upon the community altar. But I am sure that the magic jewel will bring you good luck and thus the Ever-mighty may let you go.'

'But how will *Syamantaka* give us luck? You have kept it with you. And if I do not take it to Dwaraka, I will have to immolate myself.'

'I know that. Your friend has told me all about it,' said the king, laughing. 'I have brought it here. Take it.' He took *Syamantaka* from his girdle and handed it to Krishna. 'Now go away as fast as you can.'

'We will go as soon as I get Satyaki and Satyaa ready to leave, and that shall be immediately. But one thing, noble king. What about my arms which you have taken from me?' asked Krishna.

'You never forget anything,' Jambavan placed an affectionate hand on Krishna's shoulder. 'I have placed them outside the cave—and your friend's as well. But go away at once. The Moon-bride will show you the path. It is a stiff climb.'

'I will be equal to it, noble king.'

'About the time the sun rises, you will come to the shrine of the Ever-mighty. With the magic jewel with you, the Ever-mighty may let you pass.'

Rohini clung to her father like a little child, sobbing with joy. 'Oh, Father, you have given me a new life.'

The bear-king laid his face to Rohini's neck and touched her cheeks with his fingers in blessing. 'When you live happily and have sons, think of me and your mother, my child.' The old king's eyes were filled with tears.

'Father, why don't you come yourself?'

'Child, I cannot forget that my forefathers were the kings of these people. Like them, I have the responsibility of looking after my subjects. I am getting old; I may be called away by the Ever-mighty any day, but so long as I am alive, I cannot forsake my people.'

The bear-king looked at the ground for some time. Despair was in his voice and manner, yet there was resignation too, as he addressed Rohini. Then he resumed: 'Few of us are left now, child. The bear-world is doomed to destruction. That is why I want you to escape to a better life, and the son of Vasudeva will give you every happiness.' Then he laid his face once more on Rohini's neck. Rohini offered him a salutation by crossing her hands on her chest.

Then the bear-king spoke in a tear-laden voice: 'Rohini, you are leaving the bear-world for good. Forget it. Don't remember us. Live happily with the son of Vasudeva; his world is now yours to live in.' The old man broke down out of emotion.

Rohini sobbed like a little child.

As Jambavan was leaving, Rohini clung to him and broke into convulsive sobs. She controlled her-

self with great difficulty and said in a piteous tone: 'What will happen to my monkeys and birds? After I go away, they will all die.'

'Don't worry, Rohini,' replied Jambavan and patted her on the back. 'I will try to save them as far as is in my power. But if you stay here, you yourself will be sacrificed to the Ever-mighty and then the monkeys and the birds in the trees will be no better off.'

He wiped a tear from his daughter's eyes and left, his shoulders hunched, his feet dragging.

THE TRAIL

In the cave allotted to her and Satyaki, Satyaa slept peacefully, enjoying rainbow-tinted dreams.

She was happy. She and Krishna would be killed by the Black God at the same time; they would meet again in the Land of Yama, the God of Death; perhaps, in view of Krishna's achievements, the God of all gods and His august Spouse might take them to Kailas, their home.

It had been an unmixed joy to have lived with her 'lord' for a few glorious days and nights, to be looked after by him, carried in his arms, fed by him, as if she was his wife—a fulfilment which she always dreamt of, but never hoped to attain.

Other wives of his might have shared his glory and happiness, but she had something which they could never have shared; situations in which he stood as a rock; in which he repelled murderous attacks; in which he faced dangers, manifesting immense strength.

It was very wicked of her, she felt, to look forward to the joy of their being thrown to the Black God together. But if death came that way, it would be her greatest good fortune.

In her sleep, she heard the beloved voice which always thrilled her, calling her: 'Satyaa, get up.' There was no mistaking that voice.

She woke up with a start and saw him standing at the mouth of the cave in the mild glow of the moonlight, asking her to get up.

She sat up, rubbed her eyes, stood up. Satyaki, who had been sleeping across the mouth of the cave, had already risen and was getting ready.

'Come along,' said Krishna in a low voice. 'We

have to escape from here at once.'

'Escape! How?' exclaimed Satyaa.

'Don't ask questions, Satyaa. We are leaving the bear-world this very moment. We have no time to lose,' said Krishna.

He was in dead earnest, she felt. She did not understand what he was after, but she had faith in him. She adjusted her clothes—if they could be called clothes—, tied her hair in a bun and got ready.

The three of them went to the nuptial cave. Rohini was waiting for them.

Krishna pointed to a heap of things lying near the mouth of the cave and said in a whisper: 'Satyaki, here are your waistband, your bow and copper-tipped arrows, your sword and your scarf.'

Satyaki was transported with joy. His arms were part of his self.

'My arms are here also,' said Krishna, as he picked up his scythe, his bow and arrows and his knife.

'Lord, how did you get them?' asked Satyaa.

Krishna put his forefinger to his nose to impose silence.

Satyaa was dazed; she was not quite sure whether she was awake or in a dream. Suddenly she put her hand to her head in distress. 'Lord, what about *Syamantaka*?' she asked.

'Here it is,' said Krishna, taking it out from his waistband and handing it to her. 'The Sun-God gave it to your father. I am now giving it to you. So it is yours.'

Tears of joy were in Satyaa's eyes.

All four started towards the stream, Krishna leading. Suddenly Satyaa stopped and looked around. 'Where are Uri and Mini? We cannot leave them behind,' she said, appealing to Krishna. 'We must search for them.'

'Satyaa, there is not a moment to be wasted,' said Krishna. 'Our lives depend upon our leaving this very moment. But they will be happy wherever they are.'

I saw Mini going along with the bear-nephew, frisking happily.'

Satyaa's eyes were again full of tears. She realised that she had been losing all along. She had lost her 'lord' to Rohini. A pang of jealousy had shot through her heart when she had seen the bird-girl being supported by Krishna in the same affectionate and protective way as he had supported her.

During those days of intimacy, there had not been a word or a gesture which revealed a desire to make her his wife. The future was dark.

If they escaped the Black God, she would have to go to Dwaraka where she would find no place in her father's house; where the Yadavas would not receive her as one of them; where she would always remain branded with the stigma of having run away with Satyaki. Now the final stroke of misfortune had come—the one creature in the world who loved her for her sake—Uri—had forsaken her.

Her only hope was in the Black God. He might come to her rescue and accept her as an offering, and perhaps the Ever-mighty might spare Krishna.

They crossed the stream, washed their faces and drank the cool water from it. Then they took to the trail.

'Where are you going, lord?' Satyaa asked Krishna.

Krishna pointed to the high peak which overshadowed the bear-world.

They climbed up to the peak, which was steep and slippery. Krishna, supporting Rohini, led the way. Satyaki helped Satyaa.

At dawn, they reached level ground, over which the trail ran. They decided to rest there for a while to recover their breath.

Krishna turned to Rohini: 'Jambavati, you have left the bear-world. Now forget it—that was what your father told you. Satyaa will braid your long hair, so that it may not come in the way of your climbing the peak.'

'Braid my hair!' exclaimed the bird-girl with a childish horror of being without anything to wear.

'Won't she look very much better that way?' Krishna asked Satyaa in a mocking tone.

'She will, lord,' replied Satyaa, smiling mischievously at Rohini.

'Satyaki, give the scarf which serves as your waistband to Satyaa. She will tear off pieces to cover Rohini's breast and loins.'

Rohini turned pale when Satyaa, following Krishna's instructions, braided her hair and tied a piece of cloth over her breasts and covered her loins with another.

Krishna, who was watching Satyaa's face very carefully, gauged the struggle going on in her heart. He placed an affectionate hand on her shoulder and said in an indulgent manner: 'Satyaa, you promised not to go off into hysterics. When we reach Dwaraka, I will free you from your pledge, not till then. . . .,' he added in a mocking voice.

'If we reach Dwaraka, . . .,' began Satyaa, her lips trembling, and broke down. He laughed mischievously like a naughty boy.

Krishna then got up to resume their journey. 'This part of the trail is very steep and treacherous. Satyaki, you go in front with your bow and arrows. Don't use them unless I tell you to do so.'

'That is all right,' said Satyaki heartily. With his bow and quiver of arrows on his shoulder, he had regained his old spirit. He added: 'I will deal with the Black God in the way he deserves.'

'We will find a way to deal with the Black God when we meet him,' said Krishna in a whisper. 'But you should not be in a hurry to use your arms. For the present we have to climb this trail cautiously. Satyaki, you lead the way. Rohini, you take hold of Satyaki's hand. Satyaa, you give Rohini one hand and me the other. I will come last. Then we will be a living chain. Don't let go your hands, whatever happens. Otherwise, all of us will tumble down into the valley. If any

one of you slips or stumbles, the next one must give support. Satyaa is strong and will prevent Rohini from falling. If she is in danger, I am there to pull her up.'

As they climbed higher, the vegetation became stunted. Bushes and undergrowth replaced trees.

Suddenly the landscape changed. The trail, on its final journey to the peak, passed over wide steps of lava-rock.

As they reached the top of the peak, they felt the atmosphere changing; it was clammy and hot.

A distant sound of bubbling water was heard. At intervals, there was a loud hissing noise.

Satyaki, intrepid though he was, stopped still. 'What is this, Govinda?—a poisonous vapour? It is dragging me down,' he said in a hoarse voice. 'May the God of all gods protect us. My eyes are smarting. I feel as if the Great God has opened his third eye.'

They all stopped for a while. 'Close your eyes, Jambavati,' said Krishna and tore a piece of cloth from his waistband to bind Rohini's eyes as she let out a gasp.

They climbed the last step of the lava-rock and were transfixed. Before them lay the centre of the peak; in fact, it was a huge bowl with a cone in the middle, from which issued the sound of bubbling waters.

They did not know what to do. The trail now ran along the rim of the bowl and then, perhaps, down to the valley.

A number of skeletons of men and animals in different stages of decomposition—the remnants of the offerings made to the Black God from time to time—lay scattered within the bowl.

They shuddered. They were now passing through the home of the Black God.

THE BLACK GOD

Krishna took from Satyaki the *atirathi's* formidable bow and the quiver full of arrows tipped with metal.

'Lord, I see something there,' said Satyaa, her eyes wide open in fright and pointing a finger towards the place where the trail left the rim to descend to the valley.

Krishna looked at the spot pointed out by Satyaa and saw an enormous black serpent, thirty or forty cubits long, spread out on the trail at some distance, moving its snout languidly.

Its horrible head froze in anger at seeing four people behind the bushes. Its many-forked, yellowish tongue moved in and out of its mouth unceasingly.

Rohini, with blindfolded eyes, fell prostrate, shrieking in fright, invoking the protection of the Ever-mighty, Ever-fearsome, Black God.

Satyaa dared not open her eyes. 'Has he seen us? How long is he?' she asked.

'God of all gods! It is Ananta, the Cosmic Serpent,' said Satyaki.

'If he is Ananta, the Cosmic Serpent, which upholds the three worlds, we are fortunate to have his *darshan*,' said Krishna. 'Now, all of you stand perfectly still and keep quiet. If you don't, you will go mad and jump into his mouth.'

Satyaa stood near Krishna. She wanted to be swallowed herself by the Black God at the same time he was swallowed. She did not want to part with him in his journey to the Land of Yama, the God of Death.

The hearts of Satyaa and Satyaki sank when they saw Krishna stepping out of the bushes on to the trail

and facing the Black God with steadfast eyes flashing irresistible power.

Satyaki and Satyaa were dazed; Krishna stood motionless on the trail with the bow held in one hand as if it were a sceptre. A glow surrounded him and his face shone. From his mouth issued words of authority, spoken slowly and firmly:

*If thou art Ananta of the thousand-forked tongue,
If thou art Sesha, upholding the three worlds,
If thou art Kala, Endless Time, in which the
worlds dissolve themselves,
Give way to us.*

His glance, flashing power, was fixed on the Black God.

The Black God looked at him with lidless eyes. After a few undulations, it lay across the trail. Then, one part of the scaly monster humped up its thick cylindrical length and moved its head to and fro, giving forth a fearsome hissing.

Satyaa thought that soon the Black God would open its mouth and Krishna would be sucked in. As she did not want to go back to Dwaraka, this was the opportunity to offer herself to the Black God here and now.

Her limbs were all trembling, her eyes were fixed on the Black God in entreaty.

'Please, Black God, accept me as an offering in the place of the lord' was her silent prayer.

As the Black God hissed venomously at Krishna, she crossed the opening leading out of the bush. Krishna understood what was passing in her mind. He had already gauged her intentions. Without turning his face or diverting his eyes from the Black God or changing his posture, he grasped her arm in a fierce grip, twisted it and pushed her back, whispering: 'If you are going to be a hero's wife, you must let me be a hero.'

She fell down, but her every fibre was in ecstasy.

They waited, they thought, for decades. Krishna stood like a rock, confronting the Black God which looked at him venomously.

Time passed by. Neither of them would move. Then the serpent, instead of coming towards Krishna, began to slither along the side of the bowl towards the cone in the centre, from which the bubbling waters sent up hot vapour.

With breathless impatience, they saw the Black God reaching the cone of the volcano. Its head vanished into it, followed by the black, yellow-streaked sections of its long body. Soon there was no sign of the Black God.

They heard a splash from the crater as the serpent slid into the bubbling waters of the underground lake in the crater. It had returned to its watery lair.

Krishna turned towards Satyaki. 'Satyaki, take this scythe to steady yourself and keep hold of Satyaa. I will carry Rohini. We must see that we do not slip on the slime which has oozed from the Black God's body when it was slithering on the trail.'

Before they moved, they heard a familiar muffled sound coming from the part of the trail over which they had already passed. It was a half-broken "m-i-a-a-o-w."

Uri, with her kitten in her mouth was climbing up the steep trail to where they were.

Everyone of them smiled happily. Uri had evidently followed the bear-nephew and Mini when they were going to the cave of the bear-king; she had then picked up her naughty kitten and had followed their footsteps to join them.

Dropping Mini, Uri ran to Satyaa, who took her in her arms and hugged her. The kitten, however, walked with joyous squeaks to where Krishna stood and rubbed itself against his feet.

'Look at Mini, lord. She is your slave,' said Satyaa.

'I know. It is my misfortune,' said Krishna in mock despair, lifting Mini with one hand. 'Mini cannot do without me; Uri cannot do without her kitten; you cannot do without Uri. So the only way in which Mini can be with me is for me to marry you, whether you wish it or not.'

SATRAJIT THROWS AWAY SYAMANTAKA

It was almost midday when Satrajit woke up, rubbed his eyes and tried to collect his thoughts. In the last few weeks, he had become a different man, a man whom he himself would never have recognised.

He had lost his sleep; only in the early mornings did he get some sleep, but even during that short-lived rest, he was oppressed by nightmarish dreams.

His appetite was all but gone. He became irritable. He hated the very sight of his wives and children. Asleep or awake, he could not keep back the vivid recollection of the events of the last few weeks, though he knew that it was sapping his strength.

During his waking hours, he sat on the verandah, absent-minded, his eyes open, fixed on vacancy. His temper had become so irritable that no member of his family could come near him without being shouted at.

Over and over again, the same pictures came before his mind: Krishna's demand for *Syamantaka*; his attempt to strangle Krishna; his visit to King Ugrasena, demanding that Krishna should be punished for stealing the jewel; the vow that Krishna had taken either to bring back *Syamantaka* or to immolate himself.

His favourite daughter, Satyabhama, had betrayed him. She was a shameless young wanton. He wanted to punish Satyaka for his affront of refusing the offer of Satyaa's hand for his son. She had frustrated his plan by running away with Satyaki. It was a humiliation which he could never bear.

Strange things had happened to *Syamantaka*, the jewel which the God Surya had given to him. In order to prevent Krishna from stealing the jewel, he had sent it away with Prasena, his brother, to be kept safe in

the sacred cave where he worshipped the Sun God.

After his servitor had reported that Prasena was killed by a lion, he, with his son Bhangakara, had gone to the forest.

He was aghast when he saw hungry vultures wheeling over his brother's carcass, which was no more than a skeleton to which bits of flesh remained attached. He had not the heart to bear the remnants of his brother's body back to Dwaraka. He cremated the skeleton on the spot.

His servitor's report was correct. Prasena had been killed by a lion. He searched for the jewel, but could not find it. He could only recover Prasena's costly girdle and ornaments which had been buried nearby.

He followed the lion's footprints and found its carcass, on which the vultures were feeding also.

Where was *Syamantaka*? Could the lion have taken it away? Had the bear which seemed to have killed the lion, carried away the jewel?

Several persons coming that way had left their footprints on the spot. On carefully examining them, he saw that the bear which killed the lion appeared to have a companion; it was difficult to say whether it was a man or a beast. An idea struck him: Were they the footprints of Jambavan? If so, the beast must be his bear-nephew.

He found small bits rent from a woman's skirt hanging on the thorny bushes. She must have been making her way through the undergrowth. Accompanied by Bhangakara, he went through the opening in the undergrowth, yet could find no woman but only her footprints. Could she have been his daughter Satyabhama? If the skirt was hers, the bear-king and his bear-nephew must have killed the lion and taken her away with him.

The footprints indicated that several people had gone towards the sacred cave. He followed them.

When he reached the cave, he found that his guess was correct. Several people and a bear had occupied

the cave during the last few days.

The bear-king must have taken both *Syamantaka* and Satyaa to the bear-land. He decided to go there.

For years, Jambavan, the king of the bear-land, had been insistent on his daughter, Rohini, being married to Bhangakara. He had promised that, once Rohini attained womanhood, he would comply with the bear-king's request; it was the only way to induce the bear-king to bring gold dust every month as an offering to *Syamantaka*.

Jambavan was a simpleton to have believed his promise. He, the fool, did not realise that Rohini was a savage, as her father was, while Bhangakara was an intelligent and cultured Arya and an *atirathi* in his own right.

However, it was fortunate that he had now brought Bhangakara with him. He could go to the bear-land and get his son to wed the bear-king's daughter in return for *Syamantaka* and Satyaa.

He went to the pool, crossed it, but was stunned to find that the hole through which the bear-king used to come to the sacred cave, was blocked. The upper cave was filled with large stones.

He struck his forehead in despair. The way to the bear-land was barred.

He stayed for two days in the cave with Bhangakara, expecting something to happen. He hoped that the bear-king would come to the sacred cave, but he hoped in vain.

Syamantaka was gone; his daughter was gone. The access to the bear-land was blocked. There was no chance of his collecting the gold dust from Jambavan, as he had done month after month for years.

Satrajit's conceit, his self-assurance, his ambition to dominate the Yadavas, his confidence that he was the favourite of the God Surya—all lay in ruins. He sat down at the mouth of the sacred cave and broke down.

Bhangakara sat near his father with his hand on his back in silent sympathy; for the first time he saw

his ever formidable father crushed.

Broken-hearted, Satrajit returned to Dwaraka. He could not overcome an insistent fear that another catastrophe, more terrible than all others, was awaiting him. During the day, he sat moping. His eyes lost their lustre. He even gave up his daily ritual; the ungrateful Sun God had betrayed him!

Dwaravati, his senior wife, came timidly and placed the tray of food before him; then she stepped back and stood silently and respectfully, waiting for him to eat. But he sat there listless.

He heard some noise coming from the front of his house facing the main gate—a babel of tongues. He opened his mouth to shout angrily that the noise must be stopped, but the shout died in his throat.

In came Satyabhama, shaking off her step-mother and brothers who tried to prevent her meeting her father. The hardship that she had faced during the last few weeks had made her lithe and more graceful. She was dressed in a festive costume, bedecked with ornaments, a ring on her every finger, her girdle studded with jewels, her forehead covered with *kumkum* paste.

Satrajit could not believe his eyes! He closed them and opened them again. His face underwent a change; it became fierce, cruel and malevolent as he recognised the intruder.

Satyabhama, unafraid, prostrated herself before her father, trying to touch his feet. He shuddered. He edged away from her touch as if it was a snake-bite.

‘Father, give me your blessing,’ said Satyaa.

Bhagakara came and sat near his father, placing a protective hand on his back. Satrajit’s face was twisted in a snarl.

He rolled his eyes and shouted: ‘Go away, you snake! Your touch is poisonous. Get out, you disgrace to your forbears!’

Satyaa went down on her knees and joined her palms as if in a prayer. Satrajit moved a little back-

ward to prevent her from touching his feet again. Then he rolled his eyes and said: 'You ran away with that black-guard, Satyaki. You shameless woman! You deserve to be whipped. Have you come to tell me how you have disgraced me by marrying Satyaka's son?'

'No, Father. I have not married Satyaka's son.'

'Don't tell lies,' shouted Satrajit. 'Why are you clothed in festive garments? Who gave them to you? Have you taken to the life of a shameless woman?'

Satyaa's eyes were full of tears. 'Why do you say that?' she asked in a voice in which indignation was mingled with sorrow. 'Father, I have been married to the noble son of Vasudeva.'

'What, Krishna!' exclaimed Satrajit astounded. 'Don't tell lies,' he repeated. 'You are a liar.'

'No, I am not. Aryaputra himself would have come here to ask for your blessing. But he thought that you would possibly think that he had come to gloat over you.'

'Vaasudeva, the son of Vasudeva!' He opened his eyes in surprise. 'You mean the wicked man who threatened my life? Has he come back? Having stolen *Syamantaka*, he bluffed us all by taking a vow of self-immolation. You shameless woman, you have married the thief, my bitterest enemy!'

Satyaa smiled. 'Aryaputra has recovered *Syamantaka* from Jambavan, the bear-king, and he has asked me to present it to you. Here it is,' she said, picked the jewel from her girdle and offered it to her father.

'Father, he has sent *Syamantaka* to you through me. He wants you to forget the past and make our future happy. He wants your blessing.'

Satrajit looked at *Syamantaka*, recognised it and lost all control over himself.

Satrajit rose from his seat, trembling in every limb. His eyes became blood-shot. He looked around to see something to vent his anger upon. He snatched the jewel from Satyaa's hand and flung it at her for all he

was worth. Satyaa dodged the jewel and it went over her.

Satrajit got up, kicked the tray of food lying before him and walked away, muttering 'I curse you, I curse you'.

APPENDIX

A NOTE ON MEN OF DEVILISH GIFTS

Years afterwards, when Krishna described to Arjuna in the *Bhagavad Gita* men of 'devilish gifts,' he appeared to refer to men like Satrajit.

*Such lost souls, with vision dim
Like determined foes
Come forth with cruel deeds to destroy the world.*

*Quenchless are their longings.
By fraud, conceit and lust,
They live inspired and strive
Deluded, grasping lies for truth,
Bound to vows impure.*

*Engrossed in ceaseless anxieties
Till they die, satisfying their desires is their only goal.*

*Enmeshed by a hundred fetters of hope,
Steeped in desire and wrath,
They seek only to gather wealth,
By unjust means,
Bent merely on satisfying their lust.*

*'See what I have secured today,' they say,
'My mind set next on this;
Already this much is mine;
This much more shall be mine hereafter.'*

*'This enemy have I slain today,' they say,
'Those others I shall slay in time to come.
I am the lord; I enjoy what I like.
I am successful, strong and happy.'*

*'I am high-born, wealthy;
Who else is there like me?
I shall offer sacrifice;
I shall scatter gifts and rejoice.'*

*Deluded by such ignorance, maddened by fancies,
Caught fast in delusion, these men,
By sensual pleasures dragged,
Rush headlong into Hell.*

*Such cruel men of malice, most vile of men,
I hurl back again into other godless wombs.
These deluded fools,
Birth after birth passing through godless wombs,
Never come unto Me, thou son of Kunti!
They have gone their way to the lowest of low estate.*

NOTES

CHAPTER 1

1. The episode is narrated in detail in Chapter 34, *Krishnavatara*, Vol. III, The Five Brothers.

CHAPTER 2

1. Referred to in detail in Chapter 37, *Krishnavatara*, Vol. I, The Magic Flute.
2. Referred to in detail in Chapters 44 and 45, *Krishnavatara*, Vol. II, The Wrath of an Emperor.

CHAPTER 7

1. In the wedding ceremony, the bridegroom and the bride take seven steps round the sacred fire. It is essential to the marriage according to Hindu law.

CHAPTER 8

1. Every elder, unless specifically related, is generally referred to as 'Uncle' out of respect in India.

CHAPTER 13

1. Yellow silk *dhoti*.
2. Intoxicating liquor.

CHAPTER 14

1. A preparation of baked wheat flour, so dehydrated that it can be preserved for months. In olden times in India, *baatis* were kept in reserve for months on end, so as to serve the needs of the population if a fort was besieged by the enemy.
2. Vide Chapter 35, *Krishnavatara*, Vol. III, The Five Brothers.

CHAPTER 19

1. Both *Vishnu Purana* and *Harivamsha* describe her as 'the daughter of Jambavan, Rohini by name, who could assume any form she liked.'

GLOSSARY

<i>Bhagineyas</i>	— Sons of a sister (<i>bhagini</i>).
<i>Chakravarti</i>	— An emperor who commands the allegiance of vassal kings.
<i>Darshan</i>	— Sight of divine or highly respected persons, which uplifts the soul.
<i>Guyatri</i>	— The greatest Vedic prayer.
<i>Gopis</i>	— Cow-herdresses.
<i>Kumkum</i>	— Red turmeric powder applied to the forehead on auspicious occasions. Women whose husbands are alive are under a religious duty to apply it on their forehead.
<i>Maharathi</i>	— A chariot-warrior of the rank subordinate to an <i>Atirathi</i> , often used as a synonym.
<i>Rathi</i>	— Charioteer.
<i>Sandhya</i>	— The morning, noon and evening prayers of a Brahmana.
<i>Sudarshana Chakra</i>	— Krishna's chakra (discus).
<i>Swayamvara</i>	— The ceremony of self-choosing ; a gathering of princes in which a princess selects her husband.

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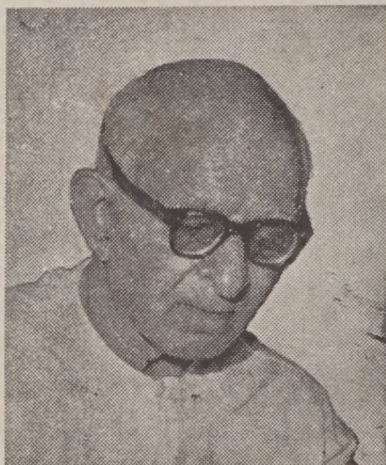
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